VISUALIZING THE PRESENT: CURRENT ISSUES WITHIN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL SAMI ART – AN ANALYSIS OF SAMI ARTISTS AND THEIR ART IN OSLO, NORWAY

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A

THESIS

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By

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Abstract

Until recently, contemporary visual Sami art has been little studied. However there is continuous activity within the Sami art world that is evident from the large amount of contemporary visual Sami art exhibits in northern Scandinavia. This paper provides an exploratory analysis of the current issues and artistic language contemporary visual Sami artists who live in Oslo, Norway are concerned with.

Through contextualizing the artworks within a post-colonial framework highlighting the dominant Sami historical, political and societal narratives from the 1970s until now, and contrasting them with the official Norwegian image of Norway as a unified "oil and gas nation," a "human rights nation" or a "fishing nation" the artworks question dominant historical perspectives and become visual inquiries of the Sami's political and societal situation currently or in recent history in Norway.

This study demonstrates that the current issues visualized among contemporary Sami artists in Oslo are humans' relationship to the natural environment; collective and personal identity; and political and cultural rights. The study shows that the artists use their Sami background as a specific context to visualize these generic issues. Finally, the analysis emphasizes that contemporary visual Sami artists have transcultural backgrounds and use transnational artistic language, themes, and expressions and therefore visualizes new and emerging fluid transnational Sami identities.

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Acknowledgement

First and foremost I would like to express gratitude to the artists Bente Geving, Geir Tore Holm, Joar Nango, Viggo Pedersen, and Gjert Rognli for their willingness to be part of this thesis. I am indebted to them for their generosity in sharing their thoughts and images, and I am forever grateful for their insights on this topic. I have an enormous admiration for their artistic works and ability to visual complex issues.

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Tusen takk!

Birte M. Horn-Hanssen,

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis explores and analyzes contemporary visual artworks by the Sami artists Bente Geving, Geir Tore Holm, Joar Nango, Viggo Pedersen and Gjert Rognli. The focus is on analyzing their art in a relational context rather than its aesthetics, specifically examining how the artworks are connected to Sami history, politics and societal issues since the late 1970s. The artists' primary mediums are photography, video work, film, performance, multimedia, publications, painting, and drawing. Using the interdisciplinary theoretical framework of *visual culture,* focusing on the concept of sense of place and space in the artworks; transnational inquiries surrounding identity, historical injustices, humans' relationships with the environment, and political and cultural rights materialize.

The issue of identity is interpreted from the artworks through the juxtaposition of Sami collective identity with the artists' individualized portrayals of Sami people and the artists' backgrounds. What emerge are transcultural understandings of identity where urban and rural influences shape new visual fluid Sami identities. The historical component becomes evident when the artists visually refer to the recent past by emphasizing societal changes and thereby suggests new ways of investigating current Sami identity and political issues. The discussion of humans' relationship with nature materializes with visual references to subsistence activities, local and global environmental concerns, and recreational and industrial use of nature. Political, cultural and inherent natural rights emerge as a topic through the artists' focus on visually

exploring the right to land and water, and as well as visually exploring official Sami buildings.

The objective of this thesis is to further the empirical knowledge and contextual understanding of contemporary Sami visual art through visual culture's transcultural understanding of art. The thesis will explore how the context, here understood as the artists' personal and professional backgrounds and explanations, as well as historical, political and social conditions, contributes to what is perceived in the art and how this interpretation adds to the current understanding of Sami-related concerns. Additionally this thesis aims to offer a nuanced visual picture of Sami artists and contemporary visual Sami art by presenting several photos of each artist and his or her artworks. Thus, this thesis does not utilize a linear historical or art history approach, but provides an exploratory and contextualized analysis of contemporary Sami art based on interviews with the five Sami artists identified above.

Until recently, contemporary visual Sami art has been little studied. However, the Norwegian art historian Hanne H. Hansen recently published her doctoral thesis *Fluktlinjer – Forståelser av samisk samtidskunst*[1] (Pathways – Understandings of Contemporary Sami Art) in August 2010, and the University of Tromsø in Norway is currently engaged in a research project titled *SARP – The Sami Art Research Project*, which aims to challenge the way in which Sami art has been understood until recently.[2] Interest in contemporary Sami art as a field of scholarly study has grown in recent years,

[1] Hanne H. Hansen, "Fluklinjer – Forståelser av samisk samtidskunst" (Phd diss. University of Tromsø, 2010).
[2] The Sami Art Research Project (SARP), University of Tromsø, Norway: http://www2.uit.no/ikbViewer/page/ansatte/organisasjon/artikkel?p_document_id=92950&p_dimension_id=88147&p_lang=2.

but except for Hansen's work on the topic and a small number of graduate thesis and dissertations, there is limited information available. Nevertheless, there is continuous activity in contemporary Sami art exhibits, which has recently been underscored with the newly published book *Hotel Polar Capital*[3], published by the Sami Art Festival 2008-2011 that provides visual and analytical insight into several art projects in the Barents Arctic.

The limited availability of academic articles on contemporary visual Sami art piqued my interest in learning about this topic through research. Additionally, the Norwegian researcher Harald Eidheim's statement in his 1995 essay *On the Organization of Knowledge in Sami Ethno-Politics* that Sami artists are "influential voices in the discourse about what it means to be Sami in the modern world,"[5] has fueled curiosity and has contributed to the analytical approach in this thesis.

Also the fact that I am a Norwegian who lives in Alaska and is interested in both art and circumpolar issues contributed to my interest in this topic. Living in Alaska and abstractly looking back over the North Pole at Norway has given me a "far away perspective" of the country of my birth, and I discovered an artistic world related to the North with which I was not familiar and about which I wanted to learn more. Thus, investigating contemporary Sami art in the Northern Studies Program at University of Alaska Fairbanks has been meaningful.

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[3] Hilde Methi and Kristin Tårnesvik, *Hotel Polar Capital* (Kirkenes, Norway: Sami Art Festival 2008–2011, 2011), http://samiartfestival.org/participants/materials/18.

[5] Harald Eidheim, "On the Organization of Knowledge in Sami Ethno-Politics," in *Becoming Visible - Indigenous Politics and Self-Government*, ed. Terje Brantenberg, Janne Hansen, and Henry Minde (Tromsø, Norway: University of Tromsø, Sami dutkamiid guovddáš - Centre for Sami Studies, 1995), http://www.sze.hu/mtdi/gyoreuropa/ANGOL/EidheimSamiEthno.doc.

However studying artists who are part of an indigenous culture is a sensitive issue and requires a certain level of caution and awareness. Owing to historical injustices toward indigenous people in research this thesis aims to portray the artists as accurately as possible, and to avoid interpreting meanings from their statements that they did not intend, especially as their statements are translated from Norwegian to English. Thus in keeping with this effort not to project meanings onto the artwork or intention onto the artists inappropriately, the analysis of the artworks will stay close to the artists' stated intent, and the artists' explanations are used as a starting point for analysis. As is proper protocol, the research project description, interview questionnaire, and artist consent forms were all reviewed and approved by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Institutional Review Board in spring 2010 and the project was given exempt status.[6] Furthermore all descriptions of the artists were sent back to them for approval and all were asked if they felt comfortable with how they were presented.

It should also be noted that in recent years some Sami has argue that only researchers with Sami background should investigate issues related to the Sami. I do not have a Sami background and am an outsider to Sami culture, which poses potential limitations on my understanding of certain uses of non-obvious Sami symbolism in the artworks. However, I hope that by relying on the artists' narrations that my presentation of the artists and their artworks is a careful, respectful and considerate contribution to the topic. The current transcultural approach to contemporary Sami art in terms of using mainly photography, video, and painting by the artists included herein aids in making the

[6] IRB Protocol Application: Protocol #: 10-27.

artistic form and visual language (except for some symbolism) comprehensible to outsiders.

Furthermore the historical, political and societal context is not without its own controversies. The Norwegian government's policy towards the Sami was until the mid-1970s (for a period of at least 120 years) a strategy of homogenization, assimilation and discrimination. This resulted in a limited understanding and knowledge of the Sami in Norwegian society, with potentially vastly different and conflicted understandings of recent history resulting among Sami and other Norwegians. This thesis aims to tread carefully in this historically charged environment.

To analyze contemporary visual Sami art, I interviewed five Sami artists about themselves and their work, and one Sami art curator and manager who is not Sami himself. The purpose of the interviews was not to create a general or conclusive analysis of Sami visual art, but to learn from insiders' perspectives about the contemporary visual Sami art scene.

As research projects always are, this thesis research is circumscribed. The project is specifically focused on Sami artists in the Oslo region; thus it excludes Sami artists from other areas of Norway as well as in other countries. Owing to logistical and economical constraints, it was difficult at this time to include a wider scope in the project.

1.1 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the existing research and literature on contemporary visual Sami art, highlighting recent work by Hanne H. Hansen and her

emphasis on seeking to understand art from context to demonstrate that the analytical approach of this thesis falls within existing theories and to explain how this analytical framework contributes to further developments within the field. Additionally, the chapter outlines and analyses exhibit catalogs of contemporary Sami art shows and art journals to stress some of the recent debates, categorizations and understandings of contemporary Sami art. This chapter also assesses the approach of indigenous art theory and its inadequacy as the sole method for studying indigenous art.

Chapter 3 addresses methodologies and theoretical approaches used to analyze contemporary visual Sami art in this thesis. The chapter demonstrates how the theoretical focus of visual culture as presented by Nicholas Mirzoeff allows for transcultural contextualization and understandings of contemporary Sami visual art. The chapter also presents Thera Mjaaland's argument regarding photographs' analytical value, in addition to the value in a given text, to emphasize how the photographs included in this thesis enhance both the empirical and analytical understanding of the art and the artists. Finally, this chapter explains how this artist research project was designed, how the artists were selected and under what conditions they were interviewed.

Chapter 4 provides a historical, political and social overview of the Sami in Norway in order to further the contextualization of the Sami artists and their work. In addition the chapter outlines the main Sami art organizations and addresses the Norwegian art world.

Chapter 5 presents artist profiles with several photos of the artists and their artwork. The artist profiles include biographical information, cultural background, working methods and the artists' own explanations of their art.

The analysis in Chapter 6 examines the visual and the non-visual elements in the artworks. The analysis focuses on how the artworks and the artists' statements and portrayals, coupled with contextual background, contribute to a multifaceted and transcultural understanding of the artists' relationship to the post-colonial narratives of Sami history, society, identity, and their relationship to nature, and sense of place and space.

The final chapter emphasizes how together the artists' profiles; the historical, political and social context; the artworks and the photographs of the artists weave a complex understanding of issues within contemporary visual Sami art. The chapter concludes that contemporary visual Sami art as presented in this thesis is transnational in nature and is currently concerned with the broad issues of humans' relationship to the natural environment; collective and personal identity; and political and cultural rights. Specifically the conclusion stresses that the artists use their Sami background as a context to highlight these generic issues. Moreover, the conclusion emphasizes how contextualization of the artworks highlights contemporary Sami art as an expression of what is created between individuals, perspectives and cultures and therefore leads to innovative ways of inquiry to societal concerns.

Chapter 2 Related Research and Literature

2.1 Existing Research on Contemporary Sami Art

Before presenting the theoretical focus of this thesis it is important to outline some of the recent literature and research that have addressed contemporary Sami art to provide a framework for the further analysis. The main areas of literature on contemporary visual Sami art are recent graduate work, exhibit catalogs and a few specific journal articles. The recent graduate works have analyzed the previous understandings of Sami art, and the current debates within the Sami art world among artists and curators. The exhibit catalogs and journal articles exemplify and discuss the same issues i.e. who is Sami artist, what is a Sami identity and what is contemporary Sami art.

One of the most recent and prominent analyses is the revisionist view of contemporary Sami art presented by the Norwegian art historian Hanne H. Hansen. She published her masters thesis *Fortellinger om samisk samtidskunst*,[7] which translates to *Stories of Contemporary Sami Art*, in 2007, and in late 2010 she defended her doctoral thesis *Fluktlinjer – forståelser om samisk samtidskunst* or *Pathways – Understandings of Contemporary Sami Art*.

In her master thesis Hansen states that Sami art does not fit within the linear Eurocentric construct of the art history discipline, which she sees as based on the ideals of the Greco-Roman art tradition; hence Sami art has largely been left out of the discourse. Additionally Hansen contends that previous literature on Sami art has been centered on an ethnographic, rather than that an art history perspective. This she reasons

[7] Hanne H. Hansen, *Fortelling om samisk samtidskunst* (Karasjok: Davvi Girji OS, 2007) 14.

has led to an understanding of Sami art as something ethnic, simple and exotic from the perspective of the Sami being "the others," rather than seeing the art in its own right.[8] Furthermore, she posits that the academic presentations of the Sami and their art have often used old, romanticized and stereotypical ideas for describing Sami art and the Sami themselves. Thus she finds, the limited art history that has been written about the Sami has contributed to furthering the stereotyping of the Sami themselves and their art.[9]

In addition to criticizing the existing epistemological framework for analysis of Sami art, Hansen argues that the contemporary Sami visual art scene that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s represented something unique and new within Sami art and therefore demands a new method of analysis. Among other things Hansen illustrates that the emerging art scene was strongly linked and corresponded to the growing Sami political movement and the newly defined Sami identity. Hansen demonstrates this connection by showing how the artists who founded the contemporary art scene were also political activists. For instance the Sami art scene developed its organizational structure with the founding of artists' organizations in the 1970s and 1980s.[10]

In her doctoral dissertation Hansen deliberates further on the central argument in her master thesis that Sami art from the 1970s represents a new paradigm, and she shows how contemporary art by Sami artists can be interpreted in many different ways depending on the context. By applying the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattaris, she argues for using a "heterogametic" approach, meaning that several different

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[8] Hansen (2007), 14.
[9] Hansen (2007), 44.
[10] Hansen (2007), 53-72.

interpretations of an artwork contribute to a complex and nuanced understanding of its meanings, rather than achieving one absolute explanation. Specifically, she explores through Deleuze and Guttaris' theories how artworks might represent a new way of expression and at the same time link to something that already exists, i.e. artists' backgrounds, contemporary impulses, and Sami mythology.[11] Additionally she demonstrates that Sami art and artists are not "the others,' but an inclusive part of the contemporary art history discourse, especially when viewed through the lens of the Postmodern and Modern movements.[12]

This investigative approach to creating a new Sami art history discourse is also the momentum behind the current *Sami Art Research Project (SARP)* at the University of Tromsø, Norway, with which Hansen is affiliated. The SARP program website states that SARP sets out to attain new knowledge of Sami art and to develop new theoretical perspectives about relevant art discourses.[13] A downloadable flyer from the website explains that the project runs from 2009 to 2013, and it states that the main aim of the project is to "present empirical data and to deconstruct hitherto prevailing theories and methods in the research on Sami art." The project's scope is broad, in terms of both academic disciplines (literature, art history, culture aesthetics, and philosophy) and areas of investigation (Sami art works, duodji, performance, literature or other texts, architecture, institutions such as museums or other collections of Sami art, etc.) The flyer says the project will include both indigenous and non-indigenous theories and

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[11] Hansen (2010), 50-80.
[12] Hansen (2010), 87.
[13] The Sami Art Research Project (SARP), University of Tromsø, Norway, http://www2.uit.no/ikbViewer/page/ansatte/organisasjon/artikkel?p_document_id=92950&p_dimension_id=88147&p_lang=2.

methodologies. The project description list several professors, artists, students and art institutions that are participating investigators in the project.[14] As this project description shows, the understanding of contemporary Sami art is undergoing an extensive revision, especially in Norway, and the empirical knowledge so far is limited.

However, this is not to say that SARP represents the first scholarly research on Sami art. Several master theses have been written about Sami art in the last decade. Thomas Kintel's 2007 thesis *Hva star på spill i samisk kunsverden? (What is at stake in the Sami art world?)* about contemporary visual Sami art is one of the most recent theses that has analyzed the current debates within and about the Sami art world itself. Some areas of debate that he discusses are what constitutes the Sami art world; what is contemporary Sami art; what defines someone as a Sami artist; what is Sami identity; and what are the differences between Sami handicraft, art and "Fine" arts? Kintel demonstrates that these debates are currently active within the SDS-Sami Artists Union of which most Sami artists are members. Similarly to Hanne H. Hansen's line of argument, Kintel points out that the debate about Sami art should move away from discussing *what* Sami art is, and rather focus on *how* 'the Sami' in Sami art is conceptualized in order to further existing discussions of contemporary Sami art.[15]

However, as most of the literature above is written in Norwegian, and is therefore accessible to a limited audience, the contribution of the Finnish Sami researcher Veli-

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[14] The Sami Art Research Project (SARP), University of Tromsø, Norway,"SARP Project description," http://www2.uit.no/ikbViewer/page/ansatte/organisasjon/artikkel?p_document_id=92950&p_dimension_id=88147&p_menu=28713&p_lang=2.

[15] Thomas Kintel, "Hva står på spill i samisk kunstverden" (Masters thesis, Telemark College, 2007) 7, http://www.scribd.com/doc/57262270/Hva-st%C3%A5r-p%C3%A5-spill-i-samisk-kunstverden-Masteroppgave.

Pekka Lehtola in publishing his research about the Sami and Sami art in English is noteworthy. His book *The Sami people: Traditions in Transition*[16] as well as his contributions about Sami art in the online magazine *Gáldu,* the website for the *Resource Center for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*[17] have, by outlining Sami history and different Sami art forms and artists within Nordic countries, provided an overview of Sami art, as wells as a unique Finnish perspective on the plethora of Sami art. Lehtola's book offers valuable background information for understanding Sami art but does not analyze the issues currently debated within the Sami art world or move the analysis further than presenting a broad perspective. However, he does remind the reader of the deeply rich history, and the multifaceted and complex cultural world of the Sami in all Nordic countries. By making Sami history easily accessible, his book serves as a reminder to people interested in Sami art to be careful and to pay respect to the nuances within contemporary Sami art.

2.2 Exhibit Catalogs on Contemporary Sami Art

While published research material on contemporary visual Sami art has been limited, there have been a multitude of contemporary Sami art exhibits in the last decade, especially in Northern Scandinavia, and the exhibit catalogs published in conjunction with several contemporary Sami art exhibitions have served as important fora for discussing Sami art, as they include articles written by artists, curators and art critics and

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[16] Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *The Sami People-Traditions in Transition* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2004).
[17] Veli-Pekka Lehtola, "Art", Gáldu *Čála- Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, http://www.galdu.org/web/index.php?sladja=25&vuolitsladja=11&vuolitvuolitsladja=6&giella1=eng.

historians discussing some of the topics examined by Kintel in his thesis. The exhibit catalogs from the contemporary visual Sami art shows *Being Apart (2009); Same, same but different (2004); Gierdu (2009-2011)* and *Yhteinen Maa/Gemensamt Land/A Land Shared (2003)* all highlight various aspects of the current debates. Some of these debates will be examined below to show the evolution of the contemporary Sami art discourse.

The exhibit *Being Apart* was created as a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Sami Artists Association in Karasjok, Norway. The curator of the exhibit, Jan-Erik Lundström states that the exhibit was to showcase and challenge people's perceptions of where contemporary Sami art is situated within the contemporary art world, a theme that was underscored through the title of the show. The title *Being Apart* was in English and was intended to play phonetically with the understanding of Sami art as something that is part of the greater contemporary art world (a part) as well as being something that stands apart from it, to challenge viewers' perceptions of the art on display. Additionally, the title underscores what Lundström sees as a dual process of influence in the art world. In his interview for this thesis in 2010 Lundström explains that contemporary art in general is partly shaping Sami art and at the same time contemporary Sami art influences the 'larger' contemporary art world.[18] Thus, this exhibit also touches on the subject previously mentioned in relation to Hansen's work: how Sami art previously have been perceived by art historians such as Harry Fett, Ernst Manker and Ørnulf Vorren,[19] as being on the 'outside' of the existing art history discourse, but is now writing itself into the general art discourse through its contemporary expressions.

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[18] From interview with Jan-Erik Lundström 27th October 2010.
[19] Hansen (2007), 39-40.

Similarly the exhibit title *Same, same but different,* which was held at the Umeå University's BildMuseet in northern Sweden, was also a play on words, this time between English and Norwegian / Swedish, where 'same' actually means Sami. As the title indicates, the exhibit *Same, same but different* addressed Sami identity and contributed to the debate about what constitutes as Sami art.

Traditionally Sami handicrafts, or folk art, known in Sami as *doudji,* was what was meant when referring to Sami art. *Doudji* has traditionally had its own aesthetics in the spheres of shape, ornamentation, process and colors that together create a form and design unique to the Sami.[20] However as noted above, Hansen sees something entirely new having emerged with the development of the contemporary visual Sami art in the 1970s, in Sami known as *daidda*,[21] a relatively recently created Sami word for contemporary fine arts/visual art. Daidda challenged the perception that Sami art referred simply to doudji, and debates and categorization over what constitutes Sami art expanded. The artistic blurring and overlapping of these art forms by contemporary Sami artists such as was seen in the exhibit *Same, same but different* and even more so in the exhibit *Gierdu,* which will be discussed on page 16, have not only created intriguing works of art but has contributed to the expansion of what is seen as Sami art.

Moreover, the exhibit *Same, same but different* also dealt with what it means to be Sami in a modern society. The catalog includes articles debating what makes someone a Sami artist, and interviews and artistic statements from the artists highlight the

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[20] Veli-Pekka Lehtola, "The Mental Landscape of the Sami," *Gáldu Čála- Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,*
http://www.galdu.org/web/index.php?sladja=25&vuolitsladja=11&vuolitvuolitsladja=5&giella1=eng.
[21] Gunvor Guttorm, "Duodji – som begrep og som del av livet," in *Gierdu* exhibit catalog (Bodø, Norway: Forettningstrykk, 2009), 16.

complexity of Sami identity. The issues of who is a Sami artist and Sami identity have arguably until recently been core debates within the Sami art world. In the catalog Jan-Erik Lundström, who currated the exhibit, and who is now the current director of the Sami Artists Center in Karasjok, Norway takes the debate about who is a Sami artist beyond examining the artistic expression of an artist as a defining element (i.e. for example only *doudji* artists are Sami artists), and instead uses the reasoning of the official Sami Acts in the Nordic countries, which use a person's relationship to the Sami language and Sami self-recognition as indicators of Sami identity, as basis for his further discussion. He contends that; "a Sami artist is an artist who regards him or herself as Sami, or a Sami who regards him or herself as an artist." [22] By doing this Lundström shifts the debate away from 'what' constitutes as Sami art as the defining element and instead uses cultural background and personal identity as barometers, thus opening up an understanding of Sami art as something that encompasses all forms of artistic expression. This takes the focus away from questioning the authenticity of the artwork, which is commonly done of indigenous art, as any art regardless of form or concept may be Sami art as long as the artists identify themselves as Sami. To paraphrase and translate from Hansen, "Sami art can be anything but anything cannot be Sami art." [23]

The controversy surrounding labeling something as 'Sami art', referring specifically to its ethnicity has recently received much attention. The journal *Ottar,* which is published by the Tromsø Museum in Norway, focused one of its issues in 2010 on

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[22] Jan-Erik Lundström, "Being Sami " in exhibit catalog *Same, same but different* (Umeå, Sweden: BildMuseet, Umeå University, 2004), 7.
[23] Hanne H. Hansen, "Fra stereotypi til parabol - en fortelling om samisk samtidskunst," in *Gierdu* exhibit catalog (Bodø, Norway: Forettningstrykk, 2009), 61.

Sami art. In addition to showing the large depth and breadth that exists within contemporary Sami art from architecture to graffiti, the editor commented on the phrase 'Sami art' itself. The term is potentially controversial because it combines a specific ethnicity with art and thereby indirectly categorizes art made by someone with Sami background as different than other art.[24] However, rather than seeing Sami art as a fixed category *Ottar* uses it in similar fashion to how Hanne H. Hansen explained the phrase in a interview with *SKINN* magazine in December 2010. Hansen stated that the phrase 'Sami art' is problematic; however, she emphasized that within academia one needs concepts to be able to discuss a subject and the term refers more to the context of the art rather than the art itself.[25]

Thus, the exhibit and catalog to the 2009-11 exhibit "GIERDU- bevegelser i samisk kunstverden / sirdimat sami duodje - ja dáiddamáilmmis", which translates in English to "GIERDU - movements within the Sami art world" touches on these dynamic and latent debates.[26] The exhibit organizers write on the project website that the exhibit is currated with the goal of presenting the current inspirations and dynamics within the Sami art world, as well as its plethora of artistic forms, changes, and evolution in recent years.[27]

The exhibit includes works created between 1993 and 2008 by 23 Sami artists from Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The art show is based on art works collected by The Sami Collections in Karasjok (RiddoDuottarMuseat –De Samiske Samlinger) during the last

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[24] Hanne Hammer Stien, Introduction to *Ottar – Samisk Kunst* 4 (2010): 2.
[25] Amalie Marie Selvik, "Hvorfor forske på samisk kunst?" *SKINNBLAD- Se kunst i Nord-Norge* 04 (2010), 4-5.
[26] SKINN, http://www.skinn.org/wips/326328196/newsId/1452764209/.
[27] GIERDU, http://www.gierdu.no/innled.htm.

three decades, and the exhibit was shown in many parts of Northern Norway.[28] Several articles in the exhibit catalog emphasize the concept of *doudji* and the complexities behind artistic expressions of Sami identity, Sami contemporary art, Sami art organizations and Sami art's place is society.[29]

In contrast to the three exhibits mentioned above, the exhibit *Yhteinen Maa/Gemensamt Land/A Land Shared- contemporary and applied art of the northern peoples* at the Gallen-Kallela Museum outside of Helsinki, Finland in 2003 framed Sami art as a form of indigenous expression. Contemporary Sami art was exhibited together with art created by members of other Fenno-Ugrian indigenous groups in Northern Europe and Russia. Additionally, the exhibit catalog focused on framing contemporary Sami artists and art within a linear Sami art history, which Hanne H. Hansen and the SARP project have identified as a limiting approach to understanding Sami art. The linear perspective represented in the exhibit catalog of *Yhteinen Maa* follows the traditional approach to writing about Sami art, seeing contemporary Sami art as a result of a continuous development from the earliest rock carvings via sacred Sami drum ornamentation through some of the earliest visual interpretations of Sami life and northern nature by the early visual Sami artists at the turn of the last century such as Johan Turi, Nils Nilsson Skum and John Savio.[30] By doing so, the exhibit arguably narrowed the scope of interpretation to influences of the past and assumed connections between indigenous groups that may not exist. The limitations of looking at Sami art

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[28] SKINN, http://www.skinn.org/wips/326328196/newsId/1452764209/.

[29] *GIERDU- bevegelser i samisk kunstverden / sirdimat sámi duodje - ja dáiddamáilmmis,"* exhibit catalog (Bodø: Forretningstrykk AS 2009).

[30] *Yhteinen Maa/Gemensamt Land/A Land Shared- contemporary and applied art of the northern peoples*, exhibit catalog (Finland: Gallen-Kallela Museum, 2003), 82-145.

from an indigenous theory perspective will be outlined at page 18.

Contrastingly, the recently published book *Hotel Polar Capital* by the Sami Art Festival presents contemporary Sami art in relation to the current the political, economic and cultural structures in the areas. The book *Hotel Polar Capital* presents art projects included in the Sami Art Festival 2008 – 2011 and offers a valuable visual and textual insight into many of the recent productions in the contemporary visual Sami art world. The book presents the art along with articles by artists and art theorists. The authors write that the Sami Art Festival 2008-2011 was organized as a series of projects held at various places in Sápmi and/or the Barents Region during the last three years. The book serves as an exhibit in itself and provides empirical information on contemporary Sami art, rather than a mere overview of an exhibit. Thus, as seen in relation to the exhibit *Yhteinen Maa/Gemensamt Land/A Land Shared,* the way in which Sami art is contextually framed plays a crucial role in the interpretation and understanding of contemporary Sami art. *Hotel Polar Capital* moves beyond the debates outlined above and shows a new and inventive way of presenting contemporary Sami art.

2.3 Indigenous Theory and Sami Art

Viewing Sami art only through the lens of ethnicity from an outsider's perspective has been the primary criticism of the use of indigenous theory as an approach to understanding Sami art or other indigenous groups' art. The central argument for indigenous theory is that art of indigenous groups must be analyzed separately to appreciated inherent indigenous cultural concepts.

Researcher Steven Leuthold's approach to indigenous theory clarifies this perspective of indigenous art. In his book *Indigenous Aestheticism – Native Art, Media and Identity,* Leuthold develops the concept called "indigenous aesthetic expression." [33] Leuthold explains that to understand indigenous aesthetics, we need to look not only at conceptual ideas of people's belief systems, but also at how beliefs and values are lived and embedded in social relationships, and how they link to political, economic and judicial systems. [34] He states that "indigenous aesthetic expression" examines the links among aesthetic expression, shared identity, belief systems and real world experiences and how they manifest themselves in dance, music, visual arts, literature etc.[35] Thus, Leuthold presents a sensitive view of indigenous theory by paying attention to embedded notions within art that only cultural insiders are likely to understand. Nonetheless by only using indigenous theory as his analytical focus, he reduces the artwork to a direct expression of a group's ethnic background, rather than seeing it as one of many possible interpretations for individual artworks.

These are some of the issues Charis Ann Gullickson examines in her 2006 thesis titled *Contemporary Artists from the Circumpolar Region: Aslaug Juliussen and Ronald W. Senungetuk*. Gullickson asks whether the art works of the Sami artist Aslaug Juliussen and the Alaskan Inupiat artist Ronald W. Senungetuk should be viewed as indigenous or global art. Both artists express a preference for being viewed as global artists, perhaps because of how the indigenous categorization may reduce their art to an ethnic expression

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[33] Steven Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics –Native Art, Media, and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 6.
[34] Leuthold, 6.
[35] Leuthold, 4-5.

rather than an intentional artistic articulation. Thus, indigenous theory could be applied when looking at certain art works; however reducing all contemporary Sami art to indigenous art overly simplifies the analytical focus, and a potential multitude of interpretations and understanding of Sami art might be overlooked.

2.4 Starting Point for Further Analysis

As this review demonstrates, Hansen presents a new platform from where the analysis and perspectives on contemporary Sami art should start. Rather than relating contemporary visual Sami art to an evolving Sami art history or indigenous perspective, Hansen sees both approaches as inherently limiting in understanding what it is to be Sami and what defines Sami art. She argues that any analysis should view contemporary Sami art in relation to recent historical, political and societal developments as well as to the individual artists' explanations of their work and their backgrounds. Doing so underscores the contextualization of the artwork when interpreting and analyzing contemporary Sami art. The forgoing overview of the current debates within the Sami art world shows that the topic and even definition of Sami art is complex and sensitive. However adopting some of the arguments presented such as focusing on the '*how*' of Sami art, in other words looking at how Sami affiliation is handled[36] in the analysis of Sami art, will hopefully move the analysis in this thesis beyond those discussions. This thesis will use the definition of Sami art and Sami artists as presented above: Sami art is made by someone who is a Sami and an artist, and Sami art will here be seen as a term

[36] Paraphrasing from interview with Jan-Erik Lundström in October 2010.

that refers to the context, rather than a category in order to further the analysis of contemporary Sami art.

This thesis will build on the literature presented above for its analytical tools while adding to the empirical basis for understanding contemporary visual Sami art by examining five Sami artists' backgrounds and their explications of their art. This thesis will also draw upon theories of visual culture by Nicholas Mirzoeff to explore additional sides of contemporary visual Sami art. The thesis will present photographs of the artists and their artwork in order to examine how images may expand the descriptions and analyses that are presented in the text.[37]

[37] Thea Mjaaland, "Evocate Encounters: An exploration of Artistic Practice as a Visual Method" *Visual Anthropology* 22 (2009): 406.

Chapter 3 Methodology and Theoretical Approach

3.1 Practical Methodology: Interviews

3.1.1 Project Design

The original research in this endeavor consists of qualitative interviews of artists to develop an understanding of contemporary visual Sami art. The author interviewed five Sami artists in Oslo, Norway to learn how and what are the current issues addressed or conceptualized in contemporary visual Sami art. The objective was to obtain the artists' perspectives on their art, themselves as artists and on contemporary Sami art in general. While qualitative interviews may not provide comparable information about each member of a large sample or group as easily as more structured methods would, such interviews can be important sources of insight in interpreting the artists' inspirations, motivations and objectives.[38] Thus, the purpose of the interviews was not to derive information to create a general or conclusive analysis of the Sami visual art scene but to gain insight into some of the multi-faceted aspects of and influences on contemporary Sami visual art and artists. Additionally, the executive director of the Sami Artist Center Jan-Erik Lundström was interviewed to learn more about Sami art from a managerial and art curatorial perspective.

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[38] Emily S. Adler, and Roger Clark. *How it's Done- An Invitation to Social Research* (United States: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 294.

3.1.2 Selection of Artists: Snowball Effect and Convenience Sampling

The artists and artwork were initially researched for this thesis by using the Internet and looking online at the membership list of the Sami Artist Union to obtain an overview of contemporary Sami artists living in Oslo or the surrounding area. Owing to practical considerations Oslo was selected as the geographic location. Oslo is familiar and convenient for the author.

Many artists have personal web ages where their artwork and personal contact information is listed. Some artists were contacted directly based on their Internet presence and contact information online. Other artists were contacted based on recommendations from the artist Geir Tore Holm. Geir Tore Holm is a well-known artist who was contacted via email to ask if he would be willing to participate and if he knew of other artists who were Sami and lived in Oslo. Holm provided names and email addresses for a few more artists. Initial contact with each artist was directly by email. In all, six artists were contacted, and five replied positively. There are an uneven number of female and male artists represented; however the focus on selecting artists was not on gender, but rather on geographic location and availability.

3.1.3 Interview Process

The in-person interviews with the artists where conducted in Oslo or the surrounding area in August 2010 in either the artist's studio, home or coffee shops, and each took between one and two hours. After their initial positive replies to email inquiries, the actual interviews were arranged through phone or text messaging. The

interview with Lundström took place in October 2010 via the online videophone service Skype. All interviews were in Norwegian, which is the first language for all artists as well as the interviewer. The interview with Lundström was in both Swedish and Norwegian, because Swedish is Lundström's first language. However as these two languages are highly compatible there were no problems with communication.

All artists' interviews were semi-structured qualitative interviews based around 18 open-ended questions. Additionally, the interviews were based on the idea that further information would emerge from the social interaction between researcher and interviewees.[39] This was shown to be successful, as most of the time the questions were not asked in the order they were listed, and some artists had stories or issues they wanted to share rather than being restricted by the questions. Some artists opted out of some questions because they felt that they did not apply to them. The interview with Lundström was also open-ended and consisted of the interviewer asking a few general questions about Sami art, rather than asking the questions posed to the artists.

All interviewees were asked to sign two written informed consent forms at the beginning of the interviews that explained the voluntary nature of the interview, listed the potential risk and benefits involved, and asked for permission to both record the interview with a digital audio recorder and to take photos of the artists and their art with a digital video camera. All interviewees were informed that data and photos from the interviews would be used in the thesis, and that all artists would be individually identified and artistically credited. Because of the different nature of his interview, Lundström was only

[39] Adler and Clark, 256.

presented with one consent form. All consent forms were written in both English and Norwegian.

As a compensation for their generosity in participating in the project, all interviewees received the book *Looking North: Art from the University of Alaska Museum* written by the former director at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, Aldona Jonaitis.

3.1.4 Presentation of the Data

The data collected, which is what the interview subjects said and photos of them and their art works are presented in Chapter 5 as artist profiles with text and photos. The artists are listed in alphabetical order by their last names. The artist profiles were written with the objective of portraying as closely as possible the artists' personal accounts of themselves and their work. Therefore only their first names are used when referring to them in the interviews. Jan-Erik Lundström's interview was used as background material, however some of his statements are included as part of the analysis.

All of the interviews have been transcribed in Norwegian. Though direct quotes that are included in the thesis have been translated to English, the Norwegian text is provided in the footnotes in order for the artists and others who speak Norwegian to be able to read the exact words that were said. Large parts of the interviews are presented in a third-person format to allow more space for including what the artists said and for providing context for the text.

3.1.5 After the Interviews

During the time after the interviews and in the process of writing the thesis I have stayed in touch with the artists through email, and has followed some of their interests and artistic progression through the social media interface Facebook.

All of the artists' profiles and quotes were sent back to the artists to ensure that they felt comfortable with how they were presented, and to see if they had anything else to add. The profiles were also written with the idea that they could serve as a document that could potentially be useful for the artists in the future.[40]

The artworks that are discussed in the interviews, presented visually and described in the text were chosen because they were discussed in the interview either because the artist brought them up or because he or she was asked about it.

3.2 Theoretical Methodology

3.2.1 Visual Culture

When discussing the artists and their artwork in Chapter 6 the approach of visual culture will be used as an analytical tool. In the last decade the academic approach of visual culture has become a prominent discipline within academia for understanding any aspects of culture that use visual images including art, advertisement, architecture, film, and online technologies. In terms of art, visual culture emphasizes the cultural meaning of a work of art rather than its aesthetic.

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[40] All of the specific research terminology for the Chapter 3 is based on concepts and definitions as stated in the book *How Its Done-An Invitation to Social Research* by Emily Stier Adler and Roger Clark.

Several American universities offer degrees in visual culture and visual studies, usually in a combination with or in place of Art History; some examples are the University of Rochester,[42] University of California – Irvine[43], and Georgetown University.[44] However, even though visual culture is centered on visualization and images, the American scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff has emphasized that that as an approach visual culture should be seen more as interdisciplinary rather than a replacing Art History, though the latter is how it has often come to be viewed.

Nicholas Mirzoeff wrote several academic texts in the late 1990s on visual culture, reinvigorating the subject as a viable interdisciplinary approach. In his book *An Introduction to Visual Culture,* Mirzoeff outlines the visual cultural approach and the need for visual culture studies. He states that because of the amazing wealth of visual experience that takes place in our postmodern culture through visual technology, a new framework to analyze these experience is required. He explains, "visual culture is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology."[45] He clarifies that the approach is centered on the response to visual media of both individuals and groups.[46] By visual technology he means anything from an oil painting to the Internet. Moreover, he argues for the increasing importance of images over text in modern society, and stresses the

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[42] University of Rochester, Visual and Cultural Studies, http://www.rochester.edu/college/aah/VCS/.
[43] University of California – Irvine, Graduate Studies in Visual Culture, http://www.editor.uci.edu/09-10/hum/hum.23.htm.
[44] Georgetown University – Visual Culture Program, http://scs.georgetown.edu/programs/58/master-of-arts-in-liberal-studies-visual-culture.
[45] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 3.
[45] Mirzoeff, 3.
[46] Mirzoeff, 3.

importance of contextualizing visual representation and communication especially in relation to virtual technologies and to the role of visuality [47] in an historical context.[48] However Mirzoeff underscores that visual culture is not concerned with everything that is visual, but with images that give us a feeling of being *sublime,* arguably introducing a strong subjective component to the analysis that is largely similar to the same notion within the Art History discipline. He sees the sublime component in an artwork or digital photograph as something that gives a pleasurable yet possibly terrifying (probably meaning startling or shocking) experience for the viewer. He exemplifies the feeling as the reaction to for instance the combination of two different colors or a statue of a Trojan warrior. However the sublime also refers to what Mirzoeff sees as the "attempt to present ideas that have no correlative in the natural world – for example peace, equality, freedom" as in a sensitivity to ideas that arrive from culture.[49]

Mirzoeff also discusses the "cultural" component within visual culture. While discussing the more traditional uses of culture in relation to visuality such as "high-culture" in reference to fine arts or norms and beliefs, he introduces a more fractured view of culture for visual cultural studies as opposed to a linear one, and emphasizes the intersections and interactions of images, ideas, cultural understanding from all over the world,[50] meaning that visual culture as an approach should stress the "narrations that allows for transcultural permeability of culture and the instability of identity."[51] He sees the transcultural perspective as an important analytical framework that gives room for

[47] Mirzoeff, 4.
[48] Mirzoeff, 14.
[49] Mirzoeff, 16.
[50] Mirzoeff, 25.
[51] Mirzoeff, 26.

examining issues and human experiences that are in between cultures. He observes, "culture in visual culture will seek to be this constantly changing dynamic of transculture, rather than the static edifice of anthropological culture." [52] Thus he sees the approach of visual culture as the theorization of the "transcultural experience of the visual in everyday life."[53] By "everyday" Mirzoeff does not necessarily mean the issues of daily life, but the majority's and the mass's experience of visuality within a capitalist society such as TV, internet, movies and electronic billboards. He also approaches visuality as a dialog between people who consume visual objects such as art and advertising, and how these objects are imaged or created based on what appeals to the audience, and the other way round; artists, billboard creators or marketing personnel influences what the viewers see or experience. Mirzoeff emphasizes another aspect to visual culture analysis, which is the importance of exploring visuality as an interface between reality and virtuality, because of how current technologies used for disseminating images in our society are mainly digital and online.[55]

Several people have expanded on and/or criticized Mirzoeff's works. Professor Paul Jay at Loyola University in Chicago in a talk he gave in 2000 titled *Picture This: Literary Theory and the Study of Visual Culture* posited that Mirzoeff's definition of visuality, as focusing mainly on the postmodern experience of images on screen created by mechanical and electronic means such as still photographs, film, video, digital images, etc. and the heightened importance of images over text was too narrow an interpretation

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[52] Mirzoeff, 26.
[53] Mirzoeff, 26.
[55] Mirzoeff, 26.

of the visual cultural approach, and he disparaged the historical role of the pictorial. Jay argued that the visual should not be reduced only to the pictorial, but should be thought of more broadly to include architecture, advertising, landscaping, etc. as these are also part of our visual understanding of the world. He denies that visuality is mainly a postmodern phenomenon as described by Mirzoeff with his emphasis on modern technologies and he denounces any claim that there is a paradigm shift within visuality that breaks from textuality.[57] Thus, with Jay's interpretation visuality includes images both on and off screen and becomes more than a tool for just looking at art but also a sensory experience of the world.

Jay's interpretation of Mirzoeff might oversimplify Mirzoeff's understanding of visuality, but nevertheless the broader definition of visuality offered by Jay creates a wider standpoint for visual interpretation and may fit better with how some the artists that are profiled in Chapter 5 imagine, conceptualize and create visual experiences, such as performance and installations as well as images. Furthermore Jay argues that visuality does not break with textuality but that instead both disciplines are even more interconnected than before and interpret meaning from each other.

In *Visual Culture Reader,* edited by Mirzoeff several authors expand the understanding and application of visual culture framework for interpreting images. Several essays discuss issues that visual culture addresses such as visual space, visual body, race and identity in colonial and post-colonial culture, and question visuality within gender, sex, and pornography. With the *Reader* Mirzoeff challenges his somewhat static

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[57] Paul Jay, "Picture This: Literary Theory and the Study of Visual Culture" (paper presented at La Sapienza, Rome, Italy, March 2000), http://home.comcast.net/~jay.paul/jay.htm.

postmodern approach to visual culture, especially with the inclusion of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's essay *Narrativizing Visual Culture – Towards a Polycentric Visual Culture.* They argue that visual culture should take a more polycentric approach, seeing the visual from several angels rather than following in the traditional realism/ modernism/ postmodernism trajectory but should also include alternative aesthetics such as post-colonial, Third World or minority cultural practices.[58] Additionally they argue that the visual should as an approach simply be a point of entry into "a multidimensional world of intertextual dialogism"[59] to see how art is created in between individuals, communities, and cultures and how this leads to innovation and change.

Relating this to the artists who create art, they may also exist in between communities and culture. The issue of being part of several cultural backgrounds at once is discussed by William Schneider in his book *... So They Understand.* Schneider refers to the South-African researcher Carolyn Hamilton's term "transcultural patterning" as "the active role of individuals as both inheritors of identity and conscious shapers of new identities."[60] He states that cultures that are being shaped as part of the process of transcultural patterning move beyond historical labels of culture to new identities that they actively form and derive meaning from.[61] Thus the transcultural factor plays at both how art and identities are not static but fluctuating and leads to new ways of artistic expressions, this will be analyzed in relation to the artists included in this thesis.

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[58] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam,"Narrativizing Visual Culture – Towards a Polycentric Visual Culture" in *The Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 1998), 31.
[59] Shohat and Stam, 45.
[60] William Schneider, *... So They Understand* (Utah: Utah State University Press, 2002), 8.
[61] Schneider, 8.

It is also important to emphasize that in a Sami context, the inclusion of a post-colonial perspective in visual culture by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's becomes applicable in terms of the Sami being an indigenous culture that have been subjugated by other dominating cultural systems as opposed to the more common understanding of colonization as territorial acquisition. The exhibit catalog for *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* relates colonialism to the Sami in terms of racism and ethnic exploitation, and states these issues should be seen as "colonialism *within,"* probably relating it to how it exists, or at least existed within the Nordic countries rather than something that only apply to far away places.[62] The history of the Sami is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Thus in summary, the analytical framework of visual culture allows for examining images through a lens that interprets the cultural meaning of a work, which allows for interpretation of what is not seen in the artwork, and it recognizes the dialog between the artist and the spectator through the artwork, at the same time it recognizes the transcultural nature of influences, identities and experiences. This process allows us to conceive of visuality in a broad sense without having to justify the images' positions within a conceptualized art history, but rather interpreting the artwork in terms of how it is contextualized within society and a post-colonial context.

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[62] *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, exhibit catalog (Finland, Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art, 2006), 80.

3.2.2 Why Visual Culture?

The interest in applying visual culture as a theoretical perspective for this thesis is two-fold. Firstly this approach allows for pursuing the recommendations set-forth by Hansen as mentioned above by paying respect to the contextualization of the artworks, and it emphasizes the perspective of examining what was called the 'how' in Sami art above. Thus the visual cultural approach would perhaps lead to some answers to the underlying questions of this thesis: how current issues are conceptualized in contemporary visual Sami art, or more specifically: how is the modern Sami identity imagined or imaged/visualized? What current issues are stressed within Sami art, and how do they create or contribute to the current understanding, representation and/or construction of 'Sami-ness'?

Secondly, the interest in applying visual culture theory is also based on how the research and visual art experience in this thesis exemplify how transcultural, visual and virtual reality are consumed. Except for meeting the artists (and borrowing books at the library) this thesis was researched entirely through the Internet. No art galleries where Sami art is exhibited were visited in researching this thesis; however large numbers of artworks were viewed and experienced through the computer. All artists portrayed and art organizations described have a presence on the Internet with websites or blogs, participation on Facebook and by being searchable through the search engine Google where several photos appear of each artist. Thus, by navigating the Worldwide Web anyone has access to Sami art through virtual and technical communications. Sami art

arguably has become a part of everyday life, not because it is consumed *en mass* but because a large majority of people have access to it.

As a result, the visual cultural approach becomes applicable on two levels, one as a framework for analyzing what is represented in the artworks and how these images might be understood, and two as an approach that recognizes the visual and virtual nature of the research and contemporary visual Sami art.

3.2.3 Photos in the Thesis: An Analytical Tool

To build on the emphasis of visual culture it seems appropriate to partially investigate contemporary visual Sami art and artists taking a visual approach. During the interviews several photos were taken of the artists. Several of these photos together with images provided by the artists of their art works are included in the artist profiles. It is hoped that by showing a large amount of imagery, the visual representation of the artists and their work will contribute to the analysis, understanding and representation of contemporary Sami art. This idea is based on the Norwegian photographer and social anthropologist Thera Mjaaland's argument in her 2009 article *Evocative Encounters: An Exploration of Artistic Practice as a Visual Research Method* that images can contribute to expand knowledge that is represented in the text by entering into a dialogical relationship to the text and thereby adding to what the text offers.[63] Thus rather than being merely illustrations, the photos here are part of the analytical presentation.

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[63] Mjaaland, 406.

Mjaaland argues for reinvigorating the use of photography as a social anthropological research method by emphasizing the artistic and relational in the visual process between what or who is photographed and the audience. She wants to move the use of photography in research beyond the difficulties that have been or are associated with photographic representation, such as concerns with realistic or objective representation and rather focus on how photographs might add something different to the analysis than what the text does.[64] It is important here to note that the photos included here are not an ethnographic representation of the artists but are used to highlight certain aspects of the artists and their art that otherwise may not be understandable or evident through the text.

Additionally, because this thesis is written far away from Norway for an American audience, the photos here also serve to satisfy readers' curiosity about the artists themselves and to combat potential imagined exotic or stereotypical appearances of the artists. Moreover, as the photos of the artists do not reaffirm the stereotypical image of the Sami dressed in traditional folklore working with reindeer, these images could potentially serve to feed a more undefined or complex understanding of Sami artists and their artworks. And finally, the photos stress the personal level of information the reader encounters in the artist profiles, and arguably enhances the personal contextualization of their artworks.

[64] Mjaaland, 397.

Chapter 4 Historical, Political and Social Context

As the outline of the recent literature and research frames the analytical perspective of this thesis, so is it also important to present the contextual background of the world in which contemporary visual Sami art is created and exists. This chapter introduces some of the issues currently facing the Sami, which may contribute to a better understanding of the artists' interviews and their artworks discussed below.

This chapter presents an overview of the geographical, recent historical, political and societal developments that pertain to the Sami and the Sami art world. This is by no means an exhaustive chapter on Sami culture and political history, and there is an inherent danger in presenting an over-simplification of these complex issues. However the aim is to provide pertinent contextual information to aid in interpretation of the art.

4.1 The Sami

Generally when writing about the Sami, the geographical focus is on the northern areas of Fennoscandia, the traditional areas of the Sami homeland, also know as Sápmi. This thesis is about five artists who all have Sami background but who all live in or around Oslo, the capital of Norway, which lies on its southern coast (Figure 4.1). Figure 4.1 Map of Norway.[65]

[65] Figure 4.1 Map from Norway, image from Addicted to Travel, "Norway", http://www.addictedtotravel.com/travel-guides/countries/norway-travel-guide.

However, because of how the northern areas of Norway have importance for the artists related to childhood and extended family ties, a description of the traditional Sami area is included below.

The main area of Samiland or Sápmi is comprised of the Kola Peninsula in Russia, northernmost Finland, the coastal and inland region of northern Norway and parts of Sweden from Idre in the south and northwards.[66] This region includes both arctic and sub-arctic terrain, and the climatic conditions vary from temperate summer temperatures to frigid winter weather.

Traditionally the Sami lived a full subsistence lifestyle. Throughout the last millennium, the Sami way of life has evolved from semi-nomadic hunting and gathering, involving both freshwater and saltwater fishing, farming and domestication of reindeer to intensive subsistence herding of domesticated reindeer and eventually to large-scale extensive herding management operations. However, not all Sami were involved with all of these subsistence activities, as occupation depended on the environment where one was living or migrating. Although there were, and are, distinct differences among Sami groups it has been argued that the Sami show a considerable cultural homogeneity and the Sami themselves emphasize that they are one people.[67]

There is no official registry of who is Sami; therefore the number of Sami is based on estimates. It has been gestimated that there are between 60,000 and 70,000 in all of Sápmi, which breaks down to about 40,000 in Norway, 17,000 in Sweden, 6,000 in

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[66] Sápmi – The Swedish Parliament, http://www.eng.samer.se/servlet/GetDoc?meta_id=1002.
[67] Hugh Beach, "The Sami," in *Endangered Peoples of the Arctic: Struggles to Survive and Thrive,* ed. Milton R. Freeman (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 3.

Finland, and 2,000 in Russia; thus the Sami are minority populations within each of these countries.[68] The Sami are recognized as the indigenous population of the Nordic countries. A person who is Sami is a citizen of one of the Nordic countries or Russia in addition to being Sami.

Today a small minority of Sami live a rural lifestyle. The majority of Sami are settled in towns, dress traditionally only for festive occasions, work for wages in all types of occupations such as commerce, service and administrative occupations and are active members in the Nordic welfare states.[70] Furthermore, a large portion of the Sami or people who consider themselves to have Sami background live not only in Sápmi but all over Fennoscandia including Oslo and Stockholm, the capitals of Norway and Sweden respectively.

4.2 Overview of the History of the Sami Political Movement

As emphasized by Hanne H. Hansen in *Fortelling om samisk samtidskunst,* the contemporary Sami art movement in Scandinavia and particularly in Norway emerged in the late 1960s and represented something new within the Sami art field. To understand the significance of the political context surrounding the growing Sami art world from the 1970s until today and the issues that are still facing the Sami, it is important to emphasize certain aspects of the Sami political movement during that time span, as political themes arise in the interviews below.

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[68] Beach, 1.
[70] Lehtola (2004), 10.

4.2.1 The 1970s: Defining Cultural Sami Identity and Demanding Rights

For 120 years in Norway, until the 1970s, Norwegianzation and policies of homogenization of culture and language dominated the policies and opinion of the Sami by the government, Norwegian society and to a large extent the Sami themselves. Similar policies were also in place in the other Nordic countries. There were few signs of changing policies, and thoughts of giving minorities special rights were still foreign in Norway and the other Nordic countries.[71]

It is against this backdrop of political and cultural homogenization that the Sami movements emerged with increased force in the 1970s. Not only were the Sami under pressure from socio-political assimilation and integration policies, but also from national resource development. [72] Thus the Sami felt increased pressure of encroachment on their traditional culture from several directions. This surfaced with the Alta-Dam demonstrations from 1979-1982 in Norway, when the Sami opposed the Norwegian government's approval of damming of the Alta River, because of its consequences on traditional Sami areas.[73]

The 1970s is arguably one of the most important decades in the Sami political movement because of how the Sami began to define themselves and demand rights from the nation-states. There were several coinciding factors that made this possible. Henry

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[71] Henry Minde, "The Challenges of Indigenism: The Struggle for Sami Land Rights and Self-Government in Norway 1960-1990" in *Indigenous Peoples: Resource Management and Global Rights*, edited by Svein Jentoft, Henry Minde, Ragnar Nilsen, 75-106 (The Netherlands: Edburon Delft, 2003), 90.
[72] Peter Jull, "The Politics of Sustainable Development: Reconciliation in Indigenous Hinterlands" in *Indigenous Peoples: Resource Management and Global Rights,* ed. by Svein Jentoft, Henry Minde, Ragnar Nilsen (The Netherlands: Edburon Delft, 2003), 25.
[73] Minde (2003), 67.

Minde argues that two of the main factors were increased internal self-awareness among Sami and the international recognition of the Sami as an indigenous people. [74]

Thus, a more clearly defined sense of what it meant to be Sami developed in the 1970s. It is important to note that the issue of political Sami identity is crucially related to defining rights. To understand the evolution of the Sami movement it is important to be aware of the changes in Sami identity, as they are reflected in the rights demanded.

Nellejet Zorgdrager illustrated in his 1990 article *Culture and Ethnic Identity: The Sami of Scandinavia* how the evolution of the political Sami identity changed from reindeer herding to language and a broad sense of cultural belonging, shifting the Sami identity more to a cultural identity rather than an ethnic identity. [75] Moreover, language and the sense of Sami cultural belonging has played a crucial role in relation to defining who is Sami and what types of rights were initially demanded in the 1970s.

Consequently, this new sense of collective identity with a cultural focus manifested itself in a resurgence of the work of Nordic Sami organizations such as the Nordic Sami Council [76] and contributed to a rapidly developing cultural and artistic scene.[77]

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[74] Henry Minde, "The Destination and the Journey: Indigenous People and the United Nations from the 1960s through 1985" in *Indigenous Peoples: Self-determination, Knowledge, and Indignity,* ed. Henry Minde (The Netherlands: Eburon Delft, 2008).
[75] Nellejet Zorgdrager, "Culture and Ethnic Identity: The Sami of Scandinavia" in *Arctic Identities - Continuity and Change in Inuit and Sami Societies,* ed. Jarich Oosten, and Cornelius Remie (The Netherlands: Universiteit Leiden, 1999), 200-215.
[76] Minde (2003), 80.
[77] Lethola (2004), 70.

4.2.2 1980s and Until Today: Clarification of Rights and Identity

Since the 1970s the Sami political movement has made great strides in defining rights for the Sami in the Nordic nation-states. The fight for clarification of rights from the nation- states dominated the 1980s and 1990s, and continues today. This rights thrust has manifested itself in ratifications of treaties, constitutional amendments and the institutionalization of the Sami movement with the Sami Parliaments.

As mentioned above, during the regeneration of the Sami political movement in the 1970s, the Sami movement emphasized culture, identifying the Sami as a people. In his article *The Sami Law: A Change of Norwegian Government Policy toward the Sami Minority?* Øystein Steinlien highlights the Sami Rights Commission, which was established in 1980, decided to focus on accelerating the work on a constitutional provision to protect Sami rights, whereby failing to address key legal questions of land ownership and resource rights. The Sami movement emphasized Norwegian authorities' responsibility for Sami culture rather than focusing on title to land and water.[78] The result was that in 1988 a constitutional amendment was adopted in Norway (Constitutional Section 110 A 'Sami Paragraph'), which placed the legal obligation "to protect Sami language, culture and societal life on the Norwegian authorities." In 1990 this amendment was changed to include further provisions for the Sami language.[79] Additionally the Sami Act was passed in 1987, which paved the way for the establishment of the Sami

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[78] Øystein Steinlien, "The Sami Law: a Change of Norwegian Government Policy Toward the Sami Minority?" *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 9 (1989): 6-7, http://www2.brandonu.ca/library/CJNS/9.1/Steinlien.pdf.

79 Else Grete Broderstad, "Political Autonomy and Integration of Authority: The Understanding of Saami Self-Determination," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights: Special issue on Sami Rights in Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden* 8 (2001): 158.

Parliament/the Sameting/ Samidiggi in 1989 in Norway.[80] However, because of its cultural and political focus, the Sami Rights Commission, which was established in 1980, has been criticized for failing to address key legal questions of land ownership and resource rights. This issue will be discussed further below.

Moreover, the Sami language is a defining characteristic of Sami identity for political rights. The Norwegian Sami Parliament's website states that any Sami who resides in Norway at the time of elections may vote, as long as he or she has filed a declaration stating that he/she considers him or herself a Sami; and that the Sami language is his/her home language, or that at least one of his/her parents, grandparents or great grandparents have or have had Sami as their home language; or he/she is the child of someone who is or has been registered in the electoral roll.[81] This definition was also adopted by the Finnish and Swedish Sami parliaments. Thus, the Sami language, which for a century was denied to the Sami people through Norwegianization policies, became one of the central elements in defining cultural collective identity and political rights in the 1980s.

Historically some of the main controversies between the Sami and the Nordic governments have been "the right to self-determination" and the "right to land and water," and these issues are still matters of controversy that have not been resolved. The Sami movement continues to emphasize the need for their further clarification.[82]

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[80] Steinlien, 7-8.
[81] Sami Parliament in Norway, http://www.samediggi.no/artikkel.aspx?MId1=3485&AId=3677&back=1.
[82] Sami Parliament in Norway, http://www.samediggi.no/artikkel.aspx?MId1=3485&AId=3677&back=1.

The issue of self-determination centers on indigenous peoples' right to pursue and determine their own economic, social, and cultural developments.[83] Researcher Mark Nuttall explains: "For the Indigenous people of the Arctic, self-determination is the right to live a particular way of life, to practice a specific culture or religion, to use their own languages, and the ability to determine the future course of economic development."[84] Thus, arguably self-determination is the recognition of a people to exercise control of the their own way of life alongside other (most likely more) dominant cultures. Self-determination is seen as a form of 'heightened' cultural survival within a democratic society and should not be confused with the issue of separation or creation of new states.

However, to what degree that Sami have achieved self-determination is a contentious political issue that is unlikely to be resolved soon. However the UN's 2007 ratification of the Declaration on the Indigenous Peoples is seen as a "watershed moment" for indigenous people specifically pertaining to the issue of 'self-determination'. Minde, Gaski, Jentoft and Mindre' argue that this, issues of principal importance for indigenous people have been acted upon. They state, "indigenous people have human rights and these rights must be respected and adhered to at every level of governance." [85] However, they warn that the question of self-determination of indigenous peoples it not settled until it is acted upon by global to local authorities. It is important to emphasize that all Nordic countries voted for the declaration.

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[83] Henry Minde et al., *Indigenous Peoples: Self-determination, Knowledge, and Indignity* (The Netherlands: Eburon Delft, 2008), 3.
[84] Mark Nuttall, "Indigenous Peoples, Self-Determination and the Arctic Environment" in *The Arctic: Environment, People, and Policy*, ed. Mark Nuttal, Terry V. Callaghan (The Netherlands: Harwood Academic, 2000), 379.
[85] Henry Minde et al., (2008) 3.

The debate over use or ownership of land is centuries old. One important aspect of Sami land rights is the inherent link between indigenous cultures and the environment.[86] More specifically, indigenous cultures are dependent on their traditional territorial areas for securing material bases for their cultural survival and identity.

Additionally, the 1980s and 1990s represented a time when there was an increased awareness of not just a collective Sami identity but also of specific groups within the Sami movement with discrete goals. Ragnar Nilsen outlines what he calls the 'Coastal Sami Uprising' in Porsanger, Norway in the early 1980s as having come about as a result of both increased Sami awareness and the undermining of the Coastal Sami's fishing rights and culture by Norwegian authorities.[87]

Moreover, according to Nilsen, during the 1990s fjord-fishing rights in Norway were reorganized such that local small boat operations were marginalized in favor of large-scale fishing vessels. People in the Sea Sami areas have fished in the ocean for thousands of years. This all changed in 1990 however, when the Norwegian government instituted the right to catch fish based on quotas from the previous years' catch. For many fishermen in the North in traditional Sea Sami areas where fishing has been based on using smaller fishing vessels, the fishermen were unable to fulfill the criteria for permitting and consequently they were denied rights for further fishing. This controversy

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[86] Peter Jull, "The Politics of Sustainable Development: Reconciliation in Indigenous Hinterlands" in *Indigenous Peoples: Resource Management and Global Rights,* ed. Svein Jentoft, Henry Minde, Ragnar Nilsen (The Netherlands: Edburon Delft, 2003), 21-22.

[87] Ragnar Nilsen, "From Norwegianization to Coastal Sami Upraising" in *Indigenous Peoples: Resource Management and Global Rights,* ed. Svein Jentoft, Henry Minde, Ragnar Nilsen (The Netherlands: Edburo Delft, 2003), 163.

led to increased protests from the Coastal Sami population and also to a heightened awareness of the Sea Sami identity.[88]

The 1980s and 1990s were also a time during which several major Sami rights and demands were achieved. Some specific accomplishments during those decades were the establishment of Sami parliaments in all Nordic countries[82] and several major legislative changes that affected the Sami's position in Norwegian society such as Norway's 1999 Human Rights Law[90] and Norway's 1990 ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 of 1989. The importance of ILO No. 169 is the convention's concern with indigenous peoples' access, ownership and right to use of land, specifically land that has been traditionally occupied and/or used, and the right of management and conservation of natural resources.[91]

Land rights concerns in Norway culminated with a 1997 report that recommended transfer of land rights in Norway's most northern country (Finnmark) from the state to local ownership and a new ethnically neutral governmental entity with equal representation from the county council and the Sami Parliament.[92] This recommendation became law in 2005 with authorization of the Finnmark's Act/ Finnmarksloven.

It is important to emphasize as well the current transnational cooperation that is taking place within the Sami movement. The Sami movement emphasizes that the Sami are one people living within four different countries (Finland, Norway, Sweden and

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[88] Nilsen (2003), 175-176.
[90] The United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cpr.html.
[91] International Labor Organization, http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C169.
[92] Henry Minde, "Sami Land Rights in Norway: A Test Case for Indegenous Peoples," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights: Special issue on Sami Rights in Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden* 8 (2001): 107.

Russia).[93] The former president of the Norwegian Sami Parliament Sven-Roald Nystø has said that the Sami are 'not a people that have traditions for living within or establishing national borders' and the 'borderless cooperation' of the Sami in earlier times remains an 'untapped potential' for future cooperation.[94]

Thus, in this same mode of reasoning a joint Nordic Sami initiative was established in 2000, the Sami Parliamentary Council, which is a joint body of Sami Parliaments in Finland, Norway and Sweden. The Sami Council and the Sami in Russia have observer status. The purpose of the Sami Parliamentary Council is to strengthen the collective Sami interest across all Sami parliaments and also to represent one voice internationally.[95]

Recently the issue of a Sami territorial homeland and its separation by national borders have become an increasingly political issue. It is also the most pressing issue that the Sami Parliamentary Council is involved in through negotiations of the Nordic Sami Convention, which is designed specifically to address this issue.

The purpose of the convention is to investigate the Sami people's rights as an indigenous people and tackle the problems the national borders cause to the Sami. The Nordic Sami convention is a joint cooperation by the governments of Norway, Sweden and Finland and the Sami people. A recent article on the issue states that the most difficult questions of the upcoming negotiations are expected to be land rights and

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[93] Sami Parliament in Norway, http://www.samediggi.no/artikkel.aspx?MId1=3487&AId=3688&back=1.
[94] Barbara Hocking, "Commenced Constitutional Business? Reflections on the Contribution of the Saami Parliaments to Indigenous Self-determination," in *Unfinished Constitutional Business: Rethinking Indigenous Self-Determination*, ed. Barbara Hocking (Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005), 250.
[95] Sami Parliament in Norway, "On Sami Parliamentary Council," http://www.sametinget.no/artikkel.aspx?AId=262&back=1&MId1=2547.

reindeer herding issues.[96]

In sum, the Sami political movement arguably achieved heightened awareness of the Sami both among themselves and in Nordic societies during the last decades. In particular it appears that that the establishment of the Sami Parliament in Norway, which came about as a direct result of the Alta-Dam Conflict has increased the visibility and influence of the Sami in Norwegian society. The Sami Parliament in Norway states on its website that it addresses all issues in all areas of society that involve the Sami in particular, in addition to issuing statements and being a consultative body for government authorities. Additionally, the Sami Parliament administers part of the funding allocated for Sami-related purposes through the central government budget and through the Sami Parliament. Thus, the Sami Parliament concludes on its website that the Sami in Norway have some "measure of authority in matters relating to their culture, language, training, cultural heritage, work and industry." [97]

4.3 Sami Art Institutions

It was within this political climate of the last few decades that the Sami art scene developed tremendously. Since the 1970s the Sami art world has flourished and not only in terms of a more vibrant visual art scene, but also in terms of organizational structure, financial support, and the number of active artists. The most important art institutions and organizations for contemporary Sami artists originated in the late 1970s. These

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[96] Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples Secretariat, "Nordic Sami Convetion," http://www.arcticpeoples.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=373:the-nordic-Sami-convention&Itemid=2.

[97] Sami Parliament in Norway, http://www.samediggi.no/artikkel.aspx?MId1=270&AId=3675&back=1.

institutions and organizations are the Sami Artist Union (SDS), the Sami Artist Centre (SDG), and the Sami Collections (SVD). A new Sami Art Museum is planned to begin construction within this year.[98] All institutions are located in Karasjok, Norway in the heart of Sápmi. In addition, the annual Sami art festival *Riđđu Riđđu* in Kåfjord, Troms, Norway was founded in the early 1990s and has become a vital contemporary Sami art venue. There are also several historical museums of Sami culture spread throughout Fennoscandia, however the art institutions mentioned above are the only ones concerned with Sami art *per se* in Norway.

4.3.1 SDS– Sami Artist Union

Both Lethola and Hansen argue that that one of the most important events in the 1970s for Sami visual arts was the founding of the Masi Art Group/ Sami Art group (Sami Dáiddárjoavku) in the late 1970s, which led to the establishment of the SDS – Sami DáiddaČehpiid Searvi/ Samisk Kunstnerforbund/ The Sami Artist Union.[99] SDS writes on its website that the organization was founded in 1979 and that its main mission is to be a union for all Sami visual artists, including also doudji artists and artistic photographers from all over Sápmi, and to work for their members' professional, economic, social and humanitarian interests. SDS is managed through a steering committee, and an artistic advisory board and through annual member meeting.[100] An important event in SDS history, according to Hansen was its winning right to negotiate

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[99] Veli-Pekka Lehtola, "Art," *Gáldu Čála- Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, http://www.galdu.org/web/index.php?sladja=25&vuolitsladja=11&vuolitvuolitsladja=6&giella1=eng.
[100] SDS-Sami Artist Center, http://www.samiskkunstnersenter.no/default.asp?cmd=15.

directly with the Norwegian Government about funding in 1989. Owing to access to government and other funding sources SDS has created good working conditions for Sami artists.[101] According to the website SDS has about 75 current members with an equal distribution of men and women.[102]

4.3.2 SDG– Sami Artist Center

Since 1986 SDG–Sami Dáiddaguovddáš/ Samisk Kunstnersenter/ the Sami Artist Center has been an important disseminator and coordinating body of Sami visual art including duodji and photography. SDG is working for increased visibility of Sami art and is the consultative body in all matters of visual Sami art.[103] In 2007 SDG established its own steering committee after having been steered previously by the Sami Artist Union (SDS).[104] The Sami Artist Center is strongly linked with SDS. They share website, and members of the union exhibit at the Artist Center. A new building for the Sami Artist Center is under construction in summer 2011 in Karasjok.

4.3.3 RDM– SVD– Sami Collections

The RDM-SVD–Riddo DuottarMuseat-Samiid Vuorká-Dávvirat/ RDM–De Samiske Samlinger/ the Sami Collections in Karasjok was established as the first Sami Museum in 1972. In 1974 the Norwegian Culture Council established a purchasing contact for duodji, which was later expanded to include contemporary Sami art. In 1979

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[101] Hansen (2007), 70.
[102] SDS-Sami Artist Center, http://www.samiskkunstnersenter.no/default.asp?cmd=120.
[103] SDS-Sami Artist Center, http://www.samiskkunstnersenter.no/default.asp?cmd=10.
[104] Hansen (2007), 71.

the collections started purchasing Sami art for the purpose of creating a collection for a Sami art museum. The funding for the Sami collections is channeled through the Sami Parliament Economic and Cultural Division.[105] RMD-SVD's collections include more than 900 art objects. In 2003 SVD hired the first fine arts curator, and part of the objective is establishing a Sami Art Museum. [106]

4.3.4 Riddu Riđđu Festival

In addition to the Karasjok-based institutions listed above, it is important to mention the Riddu Riđđu Festival, because of it large influence, representation and gathering of Sami artists every summer. The Riddu Riđđu Festival has been held annually for the last twenty years. According to the festival's web page, Sami associations in Kåfjord, Norway started the Riddu Riđđu festival in1991 as a Sea-Sami cultural festival. Since that time the festival has become one of the largest Sami festivals and is an important multi-cultural gathering place for indigenous peoples from all over the world. The festival includes music, film, stage art, literature, children's programs and youth camps, workshops, seminars, art exhibitions etc. The festival also emphasizes that it has permanent support from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, the Sami Parliament in Norway, and two Northern Norwegian local administrations: Troms county and Kåfjord municipality.[107]

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[105] Hansen (2007), 72.
[106] RMD-SVD Sami Collections, http://www.riddoduottarmuseat.no/web/index.php?sladja=9&vuolitsladja=4&giella1=nor.
[107] Riddu Riddu Festival, http://www.riddu.no/about-riddu-riu.21025.en.html.

4.4 Norway and Oslo Art Worlds

It is important to emphasize here that both geographically and artistically Sami art institutions, artists and the Sami art world exist within other cultural spheres such as the larger Norwegian and Nordic contexts. As emphasized above, most of the Sami art institutions are located in Karasjok in northern Norway far from Oslo or any other large population centers; however they are arguably at the center of Sápmi. Nonetheless, the Sami art world is not isolated from outside influences. The artists interviewed for this thesis, all live in and around Oslo; thus the world in which they live is both geographically and artistically connected to a larger context.

Oslo has a plethora of art galleries and institutions, and some of the largest disseminators of national contemporary art are located there. In addition to the traditional national galleries,[108] Oslo hosts the Office for Contemporary Art, which was founded in 2001 to strengthen the position and production of contemporary art produced in Norway,[109] as well as the private museum Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art that exhibits international contemporary art.[110]

To summarize, the political movement and art institutions of the Sami show that during the last 30 to 40 years the Sami's situation in Norway has changed tremendously from extreme assimilation policies to their recognition as an indigenous people with their own inherent cultural rights. Coincidentally, the number of Sami art organizations and

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[108] The National Museums in Oslo, http://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/no/visningssteder/.
[109] Office for Contemporary Art, http://www.oca.no/.
[110] Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, http://afmuseet.no/?&language=en.

artists has increased immensely during the same time frame. Various aspects of the historical, political and societal context of Sami experiences surface or serve as background information to various aspects of each artist's interview below.

Chapter 5 Artist Profiles

The artist profiles are personal encounters with the artists. The profiles include biographical information, what the artists said at the time, as well as some contextual observations of the interviews. The historical, political and societal information serves to contextualize of the interviews. The artists' statements and thoughts, together with their photographs and their artworks represent the data collected at the time of the interviews.

5.1 Bente Geving

5.1.1 Artistic Career and Exploring her Sami Background Through Art

Bente Geving welcomes me on a sunny afternoon in August 2010 to her rural home in Ytre Enebakk about an hour's drive outside of Oslo (Figure 5.1). Bente is a fine arts photographer who was born in Kirkenes in northern Norway in 1952. She has recently returned to the Oslo area where she grew up after having lived for several years outside Oslo and before that for several long periods outside Norway in Maastricht, Berlin, and Hamburg. Bente graduated from Westerdal School of Graphic Design in Oslo in the early 1970s and is represented in several permanent collections in Norway such as Nordnorsk Museum in Tromsø, Preus Museum in Horten, Sogn and Fjordane Art Museum, and The Sami Collections in Karasjok as well as the Berlinische Galerie in Berlin. Additionally Bente has participated in group shows in several European countries since 1979, and from the late 1980s she has had annual solo exhibits and/or group shows both in Norway and abroad. Bente received a work grant from the city of Berlin in 1992, and a Norwegian State work grant in 1999. In 2000 she received a residential grant at the

Figure 5.1 Photographs of Artist Bente Geving, Images A to F. Clockwise from top left; **Image A** Bente holding a portrait of her great grandparents; **Images B** and **C** Bente in her kitchen while being interviewed, **Image D** Bente at her computer station, **Image E** Bente in her driveway, and **Image F** Bente's front entrance. All images by Birte M. Horn-Hanssen.

Edvard-Munch-Haus, Warnemünde, Germany. In 2001 she received the John Savio Grant from the Sami Artists Union. Thus she has had a prolific career and is well-known photographer in Norway.

After the initial conversation Bente serves coffee in her cozy kitchen decorated in a blend of 1950s inspired furniture and Scandinavian summer cottage fixtures, and she starts to talk about her Sami background, her knowledge of the Sami language, and her immediate and extended family. She reminisces about how she learned to say certain Sami phrases as a child from her grandmother and later in life from her mother, and she states that she wishes she were taught more of the Sami language as a child while visiting her grandmother in Finnmark.

Bente tells of how some in her generation, and particularly the older generations in her family, denied their Sami background because of societal condemnation and stigma. She says that she has insisted in talking about the family's Sami background and has felt that it has been her task to remind her extended family and cousins "we are Sami." Bente says, "the Sami in my life has always followed me and I have never given up on it."[111]

Several of Bente's photography projects throughout her artistic career have addressed her Sami heritage (Figure 5.2). Some of her main photo series that relate in various ways and degrees to her Sami background are *Sydvaranger*, *Margit Ellinor* (Figure 5.2, Images D and F), *Valfart, Sted, Jakt,* and *Anna, Inga and Ellen* (Figure 5.2, Images A, B, C and G).

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[111] Bente: "Det samiske har alltid vært der, forfulgt meg, og jeg har aldri gitt meg."

Figure 5.2 Bente Geving's Artworks, **Images A to G.** Clockwise from top left; **Image A** *Anna, Inga and Ellen 01*; **Image B** *Anna, Inga and Ellen 12*; **Image C** *Anna, Inga and Ellen 14;* **Image D** Margit Ellinor 07-27; **Image E** Syd-Varanger 07; **Image F** Margit Ellinor 07-14; and **Image G** *Anna, Inga and Ellen 11.* All photographs by Bente Geving.

Bente sees her photo series *Jakt/Hunt*, which was purchased by the Sami Collections as an important piece in her artistic career. *Hunt* is a visually imagined bear hunt in urban landscapes in Berlin based loosely on the sacred Sami and old Norse beliefs in the spirit of the bear. Bente says that it is based on the cyclical relationship between life and death and how in old Sami traditions when an animal was sacrificed, its remnants were buried to create a new life.

One of Bente's more recent photo series is titled *Margit Ellinor* after her mother. The series was exhibited for the first time in Bente's one-woman exhibit titled *Forgotten Pictures* at the Preus Museum in Horten in 2005. Bente explains that the photos document table arrangements her mother begun to make in her home after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The arrangements were colorful and included items such as plastic flowers, napkins, dolls, porcelain cups etc. As the illness progressed, several items that reflected her mother's Sami background would appear in these arrangements, items Bente had never seen before.

The first photo in the series and the first photo in the exhibit catalog *Forgotten Pictures*[112] is titled *Margit Ellinor 01* (Figure 5.2, Image G). It shows the table her mother arranged with several items including one of the earlier photos taken by Bente of her grandmother and her grandmother's sisters. Bente says of this photo, "That is the table she decorated, and it changed over time." At the end of the photo series the items were more spread out than in the beginning and among other things displayed a photo Bente had taken years previously. Bente says of the photo in the table arrangement, "that

[112] *Forgotten Pictures/ Glemte Bilder – Bente Geving,* exhibit catalog (Horten, Norway: Preus Museum, 2005).

is the photo that I took in 1985 of my grandmother and Aunt Inga, and Aunt Anna (Figure 5.2, Image A). She has arranged it like something that looks like an altar, an altar with napkins. And that was so strange, when talking about the circle (of life) that goes around. And when I was going to make an exhibit 20 years later, there that photo was again."

The black and white photo that Bente mentions is part of the photos series *Anna, Inga and Ellen,* which she considers her artistic debut. The photo series is about her Sea Sami family from Sandnes in Sør-Varanger in Northern Norway. This exhibit portrays her grandmother Ellen and her grandmother's sisters Anna and Inga during a few days in the mid-1980s. Her grandmother and her sisters were the last generation that spoke Sami fluently in Bente's family, and they grew up in a home that followed the strict religious scriptures of Lars Levi Læstadius.[113] The exhibit was first shown at the Fotogalleriet in Oslo in 1988.

Bente relates that her photographing her grandmother contributed to her mother becoming more accepting of her own Sami background. When she started the project her mother questioned the usefulness of the project and asked, "is that something to photograph? They are so old."[114] Bente explains how her mother's response indicated the low value placed on Sami identity in society. As time went by and as her mother grew older her Sami identity slowly came back, and ironically, it blossomed when she began to

[113] Bente Geving, "Anna, Inga og Ellen," http://www.bentegeving.no/tekst/anna.htm.
[114] Bente: "Sånn i begynnelsen så sa hun til meg, da jeg fikk det stipendet. Er det noe å fotografere da? De er jo så gamle."

forget; it was then that her mother's suppressed Sami identity became visible, in among other things, her the table arrangements.

Bente says that she once talked to her mother's sister about identifying oneself as Sami. Bente says her mother's sister questioned her Sami heritage because she felt that she did not fulfill certain stereotypes of what was seen as Sami. Bente explains that her aunt understood the Sami as short, dark and bowlegged, and since she was blond and blue eyed she did not see herself as Sami. "This was a result of the systematic Norwegianization policies by the Norwegian government. This sits deeply in people's consciousness."[115]

Bente's latest photo project is *Sydvaranger* (Figure 5.2, Image E). It is a photo series of the Syd-Varanger iron ore mine in Bjørnevatn outside Kirkenes. The photos were taken in 2008-2009 as part of the preparations for the reopening of the mine after its having being closed for a little more than a decade following nearly a century of production. Several generations of Bente's male family members worked at the mine. Bente writes on her website that the photos portray details of the mining landscape, and by combining photos from the mining site she has created new rooms and landscapes.[116] On a personal level Bente relates how the photo project gave her the opportunity to spend nearly two years in Kirkenes and to reconnect with the landscape and the seasons, reflect on her mother's life, see old friends, learn more about her grandmother through people she met there, and learn how to sing Sami joiks and psalms.

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[115] Bente: "De var små, mørkhudet og hjulbeint, sa hun. Hun var lys, blåøyd, og kunne derfor ikke være same. Dette var resultat av en systematisk fornorskning som den norske stat gjennomførte. Dette har gått langt inn i bevisstheten til folk."

[116] Bente Geving, http://www.bentegeving.no/tekst/sydvaranger.htm.

5.1.2 Artistic Perspective and Method

As a young artist Bente wanted to explore Europe and experience its history and art. While in Berlin she saw the Berlin Wall, and experienced an Europe separated into two spheres, East and West. It was during her stay in Berlin that Bente realized the historical similarities between Kirkenes, where she was born and Berlin where she lived for 9 years. She explains that both places bordered with the Eastern Block and were strongly affected by the strict border policies of the Cold War. This historical recognition has influenced both her artistic perspective and method. She began to look for ways to combine places and history in an artistic context. This artistic perspective of looking for connections influenced her artistic method of uniting photos to create associations. Bente says, "to use those perspectives, to mix photos from Berlin and the North and putting them together to create a relation, that was how I started to combine photos."[117] Thus several of Bente's photo series show combinations of two photos taken at different places and at different times that are united together because of how Bente sees forms, lines, shadows, patterns in each photo that work together. Bente says that she photographs what she sees; and she does not stage a scene or use any specific Sami symbolism in her art.

5.1.3 Sami Connection and Identity

It was during Bente's time in Berlin that she became a member of the Sami Artist Union. Bente has been a member since 1992 and is currently the leader of the

[117] Bente: "Å bruke de perspektivene. Å bruke bilder, og blande bilder fra Berlin og nordområdene. Å sette dem sammen, og få en forbindelse. Det var sånn jeg begynte å sette bilder sammen."

SDS/SDG's artistic advisory board (2010-2012).[118] Although Bente is active within the Sami Artist Union she says that she does not identify specifically with other Sami artists. Bente says, " no, I often meet other Sami artists and we are just as different as other artists."[119] She emphasize that there are some Sami artists to whom she feels visually closer than others, however there are also several Norwegian and German artists to whom she feels visually close. When asked if her Sami identity means a lot for her art Bente confirms that, " yes, I can see that when I look in retrospect on what I have done, it has (Sami identity) followed me. The whole way."[120]

5.1.4 On Sami Art and Artists

When asked about the evolvement of contemporary visual Sami from its political beginnings in the early 1980s compared to now Bente observes, "there seems to be a new fight now. Our identity and culture must be protected and conveyed to others. At the same time is has to develop, not become stagnant and find new perspectives and expressions through art. The new generations of artists have different perspectives, and convey meaning in different artistic languages. This is the way art evolves."[121]

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[118] SDS-Sami Artist Center, http://www.samiskkunstnersenter.no/default.asp?cmd=15&ID=3.

[119] Bente: "Nei… eh jeg møter jo stadig vekk samiske kunstnere og vi er like forskjellige som andre kunstnere."

[120] Birte: "Så den samiske identiteten betyr den mye for din kunst?"
Bente: "Ja, jeg ser jo det når jeg ser bakover på det jeg har gjort. Så har det jo vært, den har fulgt meg. Hele veien."

[121] Bente: "Det ser ut til å være en ny kamp nå. Vår identitet og kultur må vernes om og formidles. Den må samtidig utvikles, ikke låses fast, men finne nye innfallsvinkler og uttrykk gjennom kunsten. Den nye generasjonen kunstnere har en annen erfaring, ser historien fra et annet perspektiv, og formidler på et annet *språk*. Slik utvikler kunsten seg."

In summary, Bente is a fine arts photographer who has throughout her career photographed her Sami background. She has lived for long periods abroad, and is actively involved in the Sami fine arts milieu.

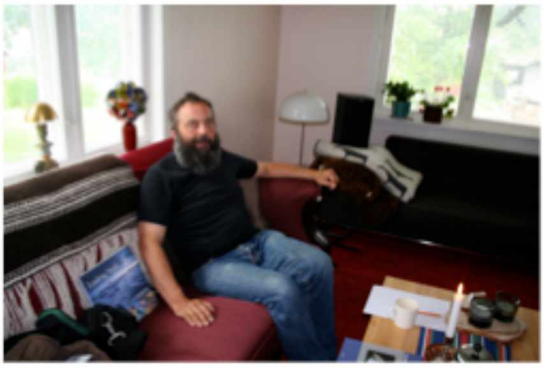
5. 2 Geir Tore Holm

Geir Tore Holm has at the time of the interview recently moved from downtown Oslo to an old homestead situated in the woods in Østfold county one hour outside Oslo (Figure 5.3). The interview takes place on a rainy day. Geir Tore serves coffee, cakes and reindeer meat in the living room of the farmhouse. The initial conversation is about his desire to live in the countryside, the transfer of nearly all the land in Finnmark to local ownership, fishing and hunting in Alaska and Norway, and his latest project, a journey to North and South America exploring the concept of indigenous art.

Geir Tore is a well-known multifaceted artist, who has recently been granted the Norwegian government's Guaranteed Income Award for artists who have shown a high artistic qualitative production, securing him a government salary until he is 67.

5.2.1 Personal, Educational and Artistic Background

Geir Tore was born in 1966 in Tromsø in northern Norway and grew up in Manndalen, a small village on the coast located about a two hour drive from Tromsø. He says that at 15 he moved away and has lived in several places since then. He has attended colleges in both Norway and Denmark, taking classes in art and landscaping. Geir Tore graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Trondheim in Norway in 1995.



top left; **Image A** Geir Tore at his property; **Image B** Geir Tore in his living room while interviewed; **Image C** Old barn at Geir Tore's property; **Image D** Geir Tore in front of his house; and **Image E** Geir Tore in his living room while interviewed. All images by Birte M. Horn-Hanssen.

Geir Tore has had an extensive career as an individual artist, curator, writer and university teacher, in addition to working with theater and stage performances. He has participated in and created several large art projects, individually and together with Søssa Jørgensen such as their project *Balkong*, which used their own home as exhibit space, and *Common Lands*, which explored the sustainability of living in Bjørvika, Oslo.[122]

In addition to curating several exhibits, he has also exhibited at numerous shows nationally and internationally including *Same, same but different*, *Gierdu,* and *Background* at Preus Museum in Horten, Norway. Geir Tore has also been extensively published in books, journals and exhibit catalogs, and is currently a research fellow in artistic research at Oslo National Academy of the Arts.[123] Geir Tore is also a member of the SDS- Sami Artist Union and has been active in the organization including being part of the artistic advisory board and serving on a reorganization committee.

Geir Tore explains how his art education in Trondheim during the 1990s had a strong influence on his artistic development. He describes the 1990s as an intense time in the art college's history when several issues within art production were up for review, and artistic forms and understandings were changing rapidly. Rather that doing classical paintings and sculptures, the focus quickly became combining various art forms, creating art through teamwork, showing in galleries and issuing publications. For him personally it was a journey that changed his perspective from working within classical art norms to exploring artistic expressions such as performance, stage art, and installations.

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[122] Commonlands Art Project, http://commonlands.net/index.php?/artists/geir-tore-holm-and-sossa-jorgensen/.

[123] Oslo National Academy of the Arts, http://www.khio.no/Norsk/Om_KHiO/FoU/Stipendiatprogrammet/?module=Articles;action=Article.publicShow;ID=5935.

At the same time he also began a personal journey exploring his Sami background through photography, focusing on the northern coastal area's rich culture and daily life, concentrating on his childhood home and the meeting between inside and outside, meaning the visual meeting or contrast between the landscape and the interior of homes. Geir Tore explains this concept as a way of being private in a public space. He says, "personally and politically, it was sort of a political idea to show where I was from and my background. Also maybe in relation to a conventional understanding of what is a Sami society." [124] He elaborates, stating that Sami coastal environments encompass a multitude of ways of daily life, which may include the more known concepts associated with Sami such as reindeer, mountains, plains and folklore but also ocean, fish, TV and indoor plants.

When asked about his Sami identity, Geir Tore says that he usually says that he has a Sami background rather than saying that he *is* Sami, because he feels saying he is Sami sometimes comes off as too strong of a statement to others. He also explains that his parents do not view themselves as Sami, even though his father's first language is Sami. Even though Geir Tore speaks some Sami now, he says that he did not learn Sami while growing up, and notes that in terms of language there is a great difference between his generation and the one before him, with many fewer speakers in his generation.

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[124] Geir: "Personlig og politisk, det var på en måte en slags politisk ide over det å vise det stedet jeg kom fra og min bakgrunn. Og så i forhold til kanskje en forståelse av hva som er konvensjonelt, hvordan er et samisk miljø."

5.2.2 Moving Artistic Perspective from Documenting his Background to Focusing on Specific Inherited Values

Geir Tore explains that dichotomies such as inside versus outside, inner versus outer, nature versus the interior are still important elements of his art. Whereas he sees the photos of the interiors as documenting his mother's and his parents' common sphere, he has now moved on to documenting specifically his father, and through him focusing on certain values such as use of natural resources, reuse and repair. One of his latest projects is taking analog photos and video of his father chopping and gathering firewood. The movie is titled *The Right to Land and Water* (Figure 5.4, Image A) and the analog photos are named *Vedbilder/Wood Images* (Figure 5.4, Image C). He explains that this project is visually placed within a natural landscape photo tradition and juxtaposed with the utility aspect of natural elements such as wood. In a larger context Geir Tore says that what he is trying to convey are the values that were taught to him as he grew up. He explains, "its about having respect for your surroundings. For everything around us. That one should tread carefully."[125] Thus he sees his artistic perspective moving from working with his background to focusing on ecology, and seeing the world as intimately interconnected and explicable only in reference to the whole.

In relation to this he mentions the project called *Sørfinnset skole/The Nord Land* in Gildeskål in northern Norway that he has worked on together with Søssa, which exemplifies his artistic approach and method of showing consideration and care for the world around us by documenting and being aware of the way in which one behaves. The

[125] Geir: "Det handler rett og slett om respekt for omgivelsene. For alt rundt oss. At man går forsiktig fram."

Figure 5.4 Geir Tore Holm's Artworks, Images A to D. From top to bottom left; **Image A** *The Right to Land and Water* (stills "saging"/ "sawing"); **Image B** *Ny Solverv 09/ Summer Solstice 2007 09*; **Image C** *Vedbilder/ Wood Images*; **Image D** *Chomolungma by the river Glomma*. All images by Geir Tore Holm.

project is seen as a long-term dialogue project in collaboration with two artists from Thailand with focus on the use of nature, knowledge exchange and small-scale architecture.[126]

5.2.3 An Artistic Dialog: Symbolism that Points in Toward the Sami Art World and out to Other Interpretations

Geir Tore's aim in documenting his father's ways of working and the inherent values in his way of doing things becomes more obvious when he responds to a question about his use of Sami symbols in his art. He says that he tries to avoid obvious use of Sami symbols in his art, except for the Sami language, which he has used frequently in performances, though he sometimes uses materials such as wood and rocks and the placement of them as symbols to refer to the Sami, which one might not understand unless one knows the culture. He says that others who do not know the culture might understand his intent differently. He emphasizes that it is the non-material in his art that is most important to him. He says of using natural materials that, "maybe they show a way of thinking or a system or cosmos."[127] He likes the way in which using natural materials create opportunities for different interpretations and ambiguous understandings, and that it also may have an informative purpose. Additionally he says that a sense of place and locality, that is, a place's unique characteristics and sometimes hidden issues are important aspects of his art.

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[126] Commonlands Art Project, http://www.commonlands.net/index.php?/artists/geir-tore-holm-and-sossa-jorgensen/.

[127] Geir: "Det er på en måte det immaterielle som er for meg viktigere, at de kanskje viser til en tankemåte eller til et system eller kosmos på en måte."

5.2.4 Artworks Focused on a Sense of Place and Locality

Asked about one of his videos titled *Summer Solstice 2007* (Figure 5.4, Image B) that depicts a natural-gas facility in Northern Norway basking in the midnight sun, Geir Tore explains that the movie was filmed in June 2007 on summer solstice a couple of months before the opening of the gas production plant. He says the film is a 20-minute silent video of a boat trip around Melkøya near Hammerfest in Northern Norway where the gas production facility is located. He started filming from the north during the middle of the night when the sun was shinning from that direction, and filmed around the production facility until the boat faced into the sun toward the north. He says he sees the movie as a simple but effective way of putting two factors together such as the cycles of the sun and the development of natural resources from the Barents Sea. He tries to film nearly every year at solstice, not because he sees it as a sacred time of year but because it is the climax of the sun's cycles.

Summer Solstice 2007 was shown at the Preus Museum in Horten in Norway in 2008, which was a year the Norwegian government had officially dedicated as the "Year of Cultural Diversity" to highlight and celebrate multiculturalism, focusing especially on minorities, indigenous people and cultural variety. Asked to contribute to the Preus Museums exhibit, Geir Tore says that he wanted to put somewhat of a critical perspective on this celebration and question the government's position of diversity in light of it's development of natural resources and what he sees as hard values such as money,

industry etc. in society. Geir Tore exhibited the movie together with a text titled *Blood and Gas.*[128]

Most of Geir Tore's titles are originally in English, often displayed with Norwegian and Sami translations. He says that is how he was trained and that contemporary art is international; thus artists use English titles. He also says that he sees titles as having an important informational aspect to them; thus making the title understandable to a large audience is important for him.

When discussing climate change in the North, his feeling of being indigenous, and his relationship to other indigenous groups in the North, Geir Tore explains more of the purpose and idea behind *Summer Solstice 2007*. He emphasizes that instead of looking at issues through the lens of indigenous people versus others, he prefers to examine society in the context of locality, in terms of local people's relations to the main actors in society, and their concerns with protecting their way of life. He states that in relation to climate change in the North and the juxtaposition between rich natural resources, vulnerable areas, small populations, and subsistence activities "that is why I have focused on oil and gas for instance. Because it becomes so obvious there (in the north). Of course I have to deal with those issues. And for example this exhibit is sort of about Norwegian identity (as an oil and gas nation), since it was for the Year of Cultural Diversity, and thus I wanted to be a little strict and introduce the natural resource development debate in this diversity celebration." [129]

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[128] *Bakgrunn/Background,* exhibit catalog (Norway: Preus Museum, 2008), 32-33.

[129] Geir Tore: "Og det er derfor jeg har fokusert på det med olje og gass for eksempel. For det blir sånn satt på spissen der (…) Det er noe jeg er nødt til å ta tak i. Og jeg er nødt til å ta tak i, og for eksempel den

5.2.5 Modeling Mount Everest

Geir Tore's emphasis on locality and seeing issues as part of a larger context is also exemplified in his latest public art commission. Together with Søssa, he recreated Mount Everest in a dimension of 1:1,000 as a concrete sculpture titled *Chomolunga på Glommakneet* (Figure 5.4, Image D) in front of Sentrum High School close to the area in which they live in Norway. Geir Tore explains that 'Chomolunga' is the Tibetan name for Mount Everest and 'Glommakneet' refers to the river that runs in front of the school. The focus is on creating an awareness and relationship between Sentrum High School in Norway and Khumjung High School in Nepal, and parts of the art project include a fund that he hopes will be used to foster a relationship between the two schools. He shows pictures of how the sculpture includes an informational plaque about Himalaya that explains the interconnectedness between the rivers in Himalaya and the river Glomma, which is Norway's longest river. He also shows how plants that are originally from Himalaya are placed in the ground around the sculpture. "This is not about indigenous people, but it is about people in specific places and local relations."[130] However he also states that it is no coincidence that a large concrete structure is placed in front of the school; he says the object is to convey issues and inform the students that "this has something to do with friendship, relations, at the same time as it is hard stuff. This is concrete, about 20 ton or so."[131]

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utstillingen her som handler egentlig litt om norsk identitet. Det var jo til 2008, mangfoldsåret det her. Og da ville jeg være litt sånn streng å dra inn de her naturresurs problematikken i det her mangfoldsfeiringene."

[130] Geir Tore: "Her handler det ikke om urfolk, men det handler om folk på steder, lokale og lokaliteter."

[131] Geir: "At man formidler noe, at det har noe med vennskap, relasjoner, samtidig som det er harde saker. Det her er betong da. 20 ton eller hva det er."

The interview ends with Geir Tore showing examples of other Sami artists and discussing their various approaches to incorporating Sami issues and symbolism, and the importance of remembering that Sápmi is not just Norway but includes parts of other countries in Fennoscandia and Russia. Geir Tore says that he prefers to identify himself as Sami rather than Norwegian, because by being Sami one is part of a larger context than just one nation-state.

Hence, Geir Tore is a versatile and experienced artist that emphasizes his view of the world as an intricate place within his artworks. He uses art to investigate localized cultural, ecological and societal concerns, and their connection to the individual, national and global spheres of influence.

5.3 Joar Nango

5.3.1 Artistic and Architectural Background

The interview with Joar takes place at his office and studio at Vålerenga, the old working class area in downtown Oslo (Figure 5.5). The studio is located in an old store, facing a street with heavy traffic. The initial conversation is about Joar's interest in looking at art in a relational perspective, meaning he likes looking art by focusing on human relations and its social context instead of making it independent and self-referencing.

Joar is both an architect and an artist, and he is particularly interested in how architecture and identity stand in relation to one another in a wider frame of reference.

Figure 5.5 Photographs of Artist Joar Nango, Images A to E. Clockwise from top left; **Image A** Joar in the street outside his office; **Image B** Joar at his desk while being interviewed; **Image C** Joar posing, **Image D** Joar at the site of *Gravøl* with his collaborators; and **Image E** Joar by his desk while being interviewed. All images by Birte M. Horn-Hanssen.

Joar graduated with a degree in architecture from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway in 2008. His masters project investigated Sami identity in architecture. In addition he has attended a fine arts school and had a study exchange at an arts academy in Berlin. Joar feels that he is more rooted in the architecture discipline than the contemporary arts scene. However he is strongly drawn to art and has worked with a multitude of artistic expressions, everything from graffiti and text art to place-specific installations. Joar's earlier work focused on graffiti and text art installations in urban public spaces. Two of these projects were called *Bergen Braille* and *22- Sheep.*

Joar has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally, and in the last few years he also currated several exhibits including *Muorrajurdagat* for the Sami Artist Center in collaboration with the Norwegian National Museum, and *Utfordrerutstillingen/ Challenger Exhibit* in September 2011, which featured work by young Norwegian architects.

Joar was born in Alta in northernmost Norway in 1979, a place to which he still feels a strong connection. Joar lived there until he was 9 years old when his family moved to Molde on the Norwegian west coast. He stayed there until he was 18, and has lived in Trondheim and Oslo since then. He has also resided for extensive periods in Germany and Canada.

5.3.2 Joar's View of Art and Identity

Joar says that one of the reasons he is drawn to art is because of the open-ended issues that arise from it. Joar says that he relates to art because he sees it as not pragmatically focused on solving a problem or giving a defined answer. "It is about asking questions and not giving answers."[132] He continues, emphasizing that by asking questions one might start reflections and discussion, and people may come up with their own answers.

Joar says that he creates art as a means of questioning identity and architecture. He relates his reflections on art to his ideas of identity and how he values the importance of not giving identities a specific definition. Joar says, "when one tries to define it, it loses value I think … in that way art and identity are similar to each other. An art discussion and an identity discussion are both difficult to answer, and it is about asking questions and not defining or giving answers, and I am intuitively drawn to that."[133]

Joar also reflects on how set definitions enter the majority/ minority debate. He states that minorities usually have to define themselves as either opposed to, or in alliance with the majority, something he also sees as an issue with Sami art. He wonders, "why is there not a greater understanding for minority populations and why is there such a problematic issue with being able to define oneself. I view that as quite odd and do not

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[132] Joar: "Det handler om å stille spørsmål og ikke gi svar da."

[133] Joar: "Men engang man prøver å definere så mister det verdi … å på den måte er identitet og kunst litt like hverandre. En kunstdiskusjon og en identitetsdiskusjon er litt svareløst, og det handler litt om å stille spørsmål og det handler litt om, det handler ikke om å definere å gi svar da. Og akkurat de tingene der er noe som jeg helt intuitivt trekkes veldig mot da."

understand why it is like that. There is of course something quite political in that observation."[134]

Joar says his artistic ambition is to move beyond what he sees as a stagnant discussion about identity, and create something new and different, using among other things humor to achieve it. He sees contemporary Sami music as an inspiration in that regard; "it (Sami music) manages just that, it avoids the issue of Sami or not Sami, or stereotype or not stereotype, and makes a large leap over all that and manages to use tradition while creating something new."[135] Joar says that one of the reasons he creates art is so that he can express his thoughts, such as those discussed above as "concrete, physical and visual projects that have a context and a history." [136]

Joar sees himself as Sami among other things. He says that he has an unproblematic relationship to his Sami identity, and can easily identify himself as a Sami artist as well as a Sami architect. He credits his continuous work with identity in Sami architecture with making him comfortable with those categorizations. Joar explains that he has at times consciously portrayed himself as a Sami architect because he finds it interesting not to fulfill the stereotypical expectation of what people think of as a Sami or architect, something he relates to his opinion of leaving interpretations (of i.e. Sami, stereotypes, identities etc.) open and undefined.

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[134] Joar: "Hvorfor det ikke finnes en større forståelse for minoritetsfolk. Hvorfor man på en måte… det er et slags evig problem det å skulle få lov til å definere å definere seg selv. …jeg ser på det som ganske underlig og skjønner ikke helt hvorfor det er sånn. Det er jo selvfølgelig noe politisk i den observasjonen da."

[135] Joar: "Den klarer liksom å unngå den dere er du samisk eller ikke, stereotyper eller ikke stereotyper, men de klarer liksom å hoppe et bukkesprang over det ,og bruker tradisjonen samtidig som de skaper noe nytt."

[136] Joar: "Det er derfor jeg gjør kunst fordi da kan jeg forholde meg til det konkrete, fysiske, visuelle prosjekt som har en kontekst, som har en historie."

5.3.3 *Sami Huksendáidda: The Fanzine*

As an artistic continuation of his masters thesis on Sami architecture Joar has created several fanzines or self-published magazines titled *Sami Huksendáidda: the Fanzine* (Figure 5.6, Image B). The fanzines are narrowly focused self-created magazines, using a collage-technique with cutouts of text and images. Joar has published six issues. The three first issues build on and explore one of the three topical areas of his thesis. These three topics are Sami vernacular architecture (Tradition), Sami institutional architecture (Continuity), and Sami dwelling-conditions of today (Culture).[137] Joar feels that the fanzines fundamentally explain what he does as an architect and artist by relating images and text about northern indigenous architecture.

5.3.4 Sami Architecture: *The Giant Lavvo Syndrome*

As a result of his masters thesis and in researching for the fanzines, Joar created a concept, or what he sees as a phenomenon within buildings that want to portray a Sami connection. He named the phenomenon *Kjempe Lavvu Symbolet /The Giant Lávvu Syndrome* as a humorous way of calling attention to how most public buildings in the Sami area are inspired by the traditional Sami tent, the lavvu (Figure 5.6 Image A). On a more serious note, by taking photos of buildings that incorporate lavvu design elements Joar aims to highlight what he sees as simplistic solutions and use of Sami symbols within modern architecture for large buildings in Sami areas.

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[137] Nango, Joar, power point presentation, http://Samiartfestival.org/files/uploads/Presentation_Joar_Nango.pdf.

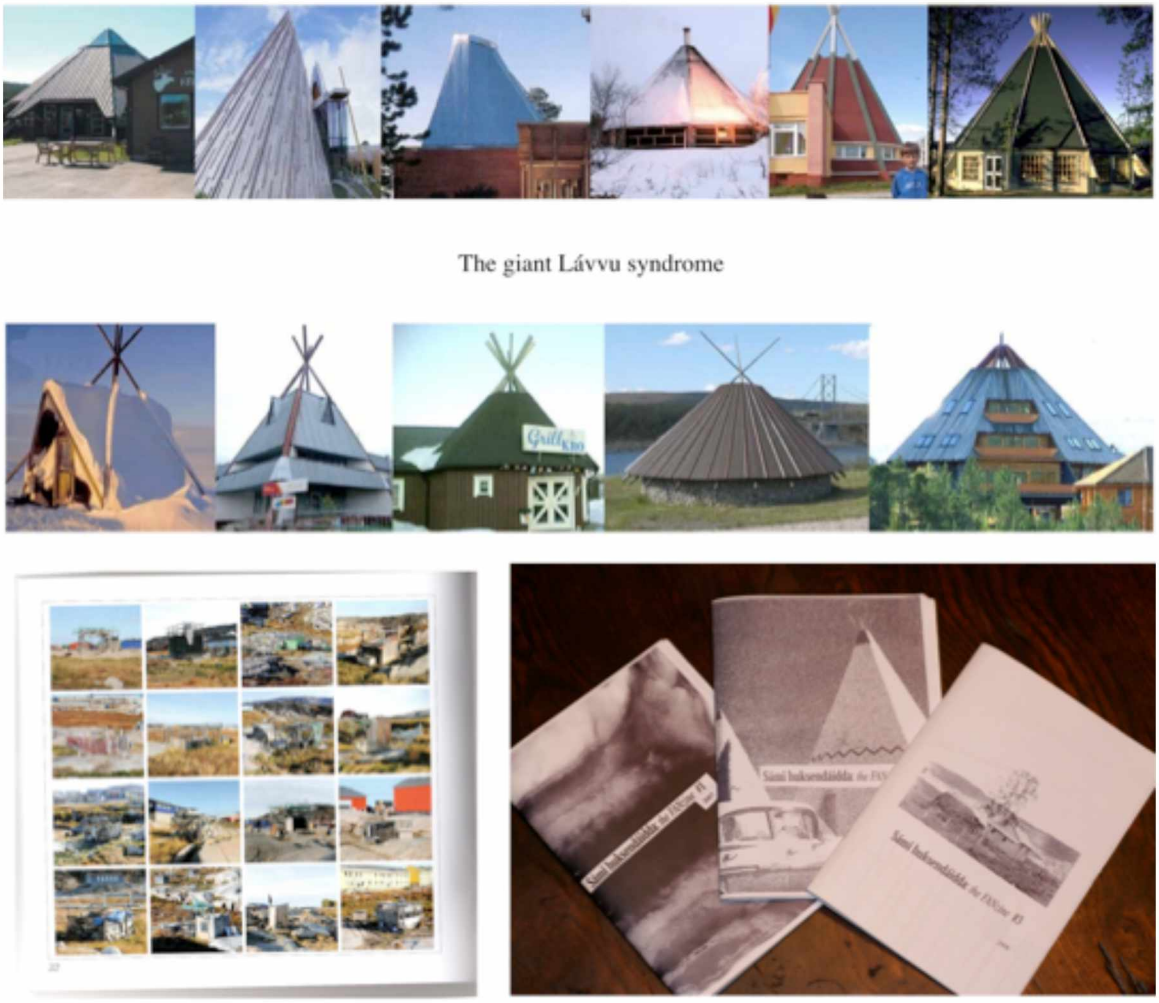

Figure 5. 6 Joar Nango's Artworks, Images A to C. Clockwise; **Image A** *The Giant Lavvu Syndrom*; **Image B** *Sámi Huksendáidda: the Fanzine*; and **Image C** Page from *Joar's article* "Nødveninghetens Estetikk" in *Ottar – Sámisk Kunst.* 4 /2010. Image A and C by Joar Nango. Image B by Birte M. Horn-Hanssen.

5.3.5 An International Collaborative Knitting Project: *Sami Shelters*

As an extension of *The Giant Lávvu Syndrome* Joar turned his photos into knitting patterns. Based on a desire to create something positive of what he recognizes as a somewhat sarcastic conceptualization of the use of the lavvu symbol in architecture, he challenged himself with making something new and useful from it. During a trip to Sami areas in Russia, he visited some elderly women who used knitting as an important secondary source of income, and the idea of a collaborative project with them was born. From there the project *Sami Shelters* grew and resulted in a large collection of hand-knit sweater patterns showing giant lávvu buildings. Despite communication problems due to language differences, Joar values the experience as a beautiful creative process.

5.3.6 Place-Specific and Processed Based Art

Joar also values the links between theoretical information and practical creation. While making the fanzines Joar held several artistic workshops to physically experience the conceptual issues stated in the fanzines. Joar says he has tried to create a link between building structures and creating fanzines based on the notion of generating something together with others within a social "room" such as a workshop. Joar says that the process of creating something together with others interests him. Consequently, Joar together with other artists, made several place-based and processed focused installations in northern Norway and in Oslo within the last year.

One example is a sauna he constructed from an old garage together with two other artists at the Márkomeannu festival in northern Norway in summer 2010. He sees the

intimate process of creating a space for a social sphere as more important than the fact that they created a working sauna.

Another example of Joar's involvement with process-based art was his participation with the Sami Artist Center's main art contribution at the Riddu Riđđu festival 2011 titled *I am Lavvo*. By building a lavvu that would feature situations not normally associated with a lavvu such as the sale of hip hop garments and artistic performance and movies, the *I am Lavvo* project, according to the press release on Facebook, aimed at exploring the artistic, philosophical, cultural and existential meanings of the modern lavvu universe.

5.3.7 *Gravøl*

At the time of the interview, Joar is involved with a comparable creative process. As part of the architecture group FFB (Felleskapsprosjektet å Fortette Byen), a group that creates temporary art and architecture projects in public spaces to investigate the relationship between the use of common lands and individuals' need for space,[138] Joar is building a location-based installation at a small green open space across the street from his studio that will soon be turned into townhouses. The installation titled *Gravøl* (Figure 5.5, Image D), which is the Norwegian name for a celebration given in tribute to a deceased much like a wake, recognizes the diminishing green places in urban

[138] FFB descritption is taken from the press relase for the *Meahccetrošša/Matatu* exhibit at the Sami Artist Center, http://www.samiskkunstnersenter.no/.

environments. The installation features a sauna and hanging showers from the trees and will culminate in a public street party.

Joar explains that *Gravøl* aims to create an event and a commentary on the use of space in urban areas, and it illustrates his recent artistic approach to societal issues. Likewise, since the interview Joar has had his first exhibit at the Sami Artist Center titled *Meahccetrošša/Matatu* in April 2011, which was a place-specific installation in Karasjok with a strong focus on the value of the creative process itself as much as the end result. The press release describes the exhibit as an exploration of public space in Karasjok with emphasis on analysis of transportation structures in and around Karasjok, expressed through happenings and events.[139] Joar carefully documents and photographs all of his projects, which transforms his process-orientated projects into more easily accessible visual projects.

5.3.8 Perspective on the Sami Artist Union

When asked about the Sami art world, Joar responds that it is a complex, small and diverse group. He says that at the SDS-Sami Artist Union's annual meeting he was pleasantly surprised by how valuable it was to meet and relate to artists representing other generations and artistic forms than his own. He sees the meetings as valuable opportunities to meet artists with whom he would otherwise not associate, and who represent something different than the milieu he associates with in Oslo.

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[139] Sami Artist Center,"Press release," http://www.samiskkunstnersenter.no/default.asp?cmd=200&ID=63&Show=0.

In sum, Joar is an artist who works with artistically articulating and discussing Sami and northern architecture as it relates to identity and place-specific knowledge of the environment. Through art he asks open-ended questions of how the process of creating, be it art or a structure, actively forms our ideas of identity, community, society and the knowledge of a place.

5.4 Viggo Pedersen

5.4.1 Educational Background and Family Connection to Northern Norway

Viggo Pedersen is a visual artist who works with a large variety of artistic techniques (Figure 5.7). He works with both two-dimensional and three-dimensional methods as well as digital media. Viggo has a comprehensive educational background. He has received two degrees from what is now known as the Oslo National Academy of the Arts[140] in both ceramics and sculpture. He also has a Fine Arts teaching degree from the former National Teaching College (Statens Lærerhøyskole) in Blaker outside Oslo. He took classes in environmental knowledge at Bø College in Telemark, Norway as well. In addition to working as a visual artist, Viggo works part time as an art instructor at the Nordic Institute of Stage and Studio, a private art college in Oslo. Viggo has had solo exhibits and participated in several group shows, including the annually juried contemporary art show *Autumn Exhibition* in Oslo in 2007.[141]

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[140] Oslo National Academy of the Arts is a newly created entity, formerly know as two separate arts academies; Statens Kunstakademi and Statens Håndverks og Kunstindustriskole.
[141] Viggo Pedersen, http://home.broadpark.no/~viggop/cv/cv.html.

Figure 5.7 Photographs of Artist Viggo Pedersen, Image A to E. Clockwise from top left; **Image A** Viggo illustrating how he traced the shape for *Natur Begjær*; **Image B** Viggo in his studio; **Image C** Artworks by Viggo in process; **Image D** Viggo talking about his videos and image manipulation; and **Image E** Viggo describing his painting and drawing *Ku/Cow*. All images by Birte M. Horn-Hanssen.

Viggo shares a studio in the basement of an old apartment building in downtown Oslo with a few other artists. The interview takes place in his workspace surrounded by several of his artworks. The interview begins with Viggo talking about his personal and artistic background.

He explains that his family is from Nesseby in Varangerfjorden in Finnmark County, and that is his connection to the Sami world. Viggo was born in 1964 and has always lived in the Oslo region but says that he strongly identifies with the Finnmark region because of his close relationship with his extended family and the fact that he has spent numerous vacations in Finnmark while growing up and as an adult.

5.4.2 Artistic Method: the Ideas Shapes the Methods and Materials

Viggo's studio space contains an eclectic mix of large paintings, needle works, drawings, a computer station and tools. When he explains the way in which he approaches his art, one understands that it is no coincidence that his studio space looks the way it does. Viggo says that he is not committed to one particular artistic expression, but rather that he likes mixing mediums, everything from sounds and video to drawings and sculptures. He tries to be rational in working out strategies for executing his art. Rather than drawing from scratch he would instead trace it from a digital source. Viggo also uses his computer for creative editing of his drawings, videos, photos or sketches in software such as Photoshop and Illustrator.

When asked if he could explain his art in general terms he states that there is nothing general to say. His art is highly diverse because he uses the idea as the starting

point, rather than a specific medium such as painting. He uses what he calls an associative method to work through his ideas and to arrive at various designs. Some of the preliminary associative work is done on the computer. He explains, "it is so nice to just use the idea as the starting point, and then search for the art form that suits the idea the best." [142] He says this approach makes his art varied, and he enjoys not being confined to one form of artistic expression.

5.4.3 Nature: An Overarching Theme in Viggo's Art

However, Viggo's ideas and visual themes are not as varied as his work methods and artistic form. Many of his artworks evoke a sense of nature, which is perhaps partially a reflection of his studies in environmental knowledge. He says, "I think that (nature) is interesting, and I still work with nature now. It is sort of an overarching theme that is smoldering within my art. You sort of see references to nature throughout (my art)."[143]

Viggo has two artworks in his studio that exemplify both his interest in nature and his approach to creating art. Both artworks are a mix of painting and drawing. One of them has recently returned from being exhibited at the Sami Artist Centre (summer 2010). Like most of his artworks, they are untitled but have Norwegian working titles.

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[142] Viggo: "Det er deilig å bare kunne gjøre det man har som ide som utgangspunkt. Så får man liksom lete etter en form som passer ideen best."

[143] Viggo: "Og miljøkunnskap som jeg syns er interessant å jobbe med det, og jeg jobber jo fortsatt med natur nå. Som et slags overordnet tema som ligger der, og ulmer på en måte. Det er liksom, man ser liksom litt referanser mot natur hele veien da."

Viggo explains the first one, which is an intricate drawing of what he calls an Indian sacred cow and a large painted green spot (Figure 5.7, Image E). He says, "there is a dialog between the green and the cow, and the cow is looking at us. (…) It might demand something in relation to something green. Green is also universal for the environment and that sort of thing. Green is nature for example. That type of symbols. So there might be a lack of the green for example." [144]

The other artwork is based on similar ideas and artistic elements. The same large green spot is an important feature of a painting that is done on a large piece of plywood. The working title was *Nature Begjær (Nature Desire)* (Figure 5.7, Image A). Viggo describes how inside the large green spot there is a real size drawing of a human. A person wearing headphones and with a tiger logo on the back of his shirt stands with his arms out wide as though in an embrace of the green (nature). The tiger looks at the audience, and Viggo says the tiger might have something to do with extinct species, etc. The person is surrounded by the classic Norwegian fauna of spruce, pine and birch trees. Viggo explains that there are two lines of communication in the painting; the tiger is looking out at the audience while the person is "someone who is turning his back to something, to the one watching."[145]

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[144] Viggo: "Det er liksom en dialog mellom det grønne og kua, og kua ser på oss ikke sant. Den er på en måte noe bedene, eller forlangende, tenker jeg at den kan være… At den kan kreve noe i forhold til noe grønt. Grønt er da sånn universalt for miljø eller. Den type ting da. Grønt er jo natur for eksempel. Sånne slags typer symboler. Så det kan det være en mangel av ikke sant, av det grønne for eksempel."
[145] Viggo: "Og noen som snur ryggen til noe, til betrakter ikke sant. Slik at det er en toveis linje som går."

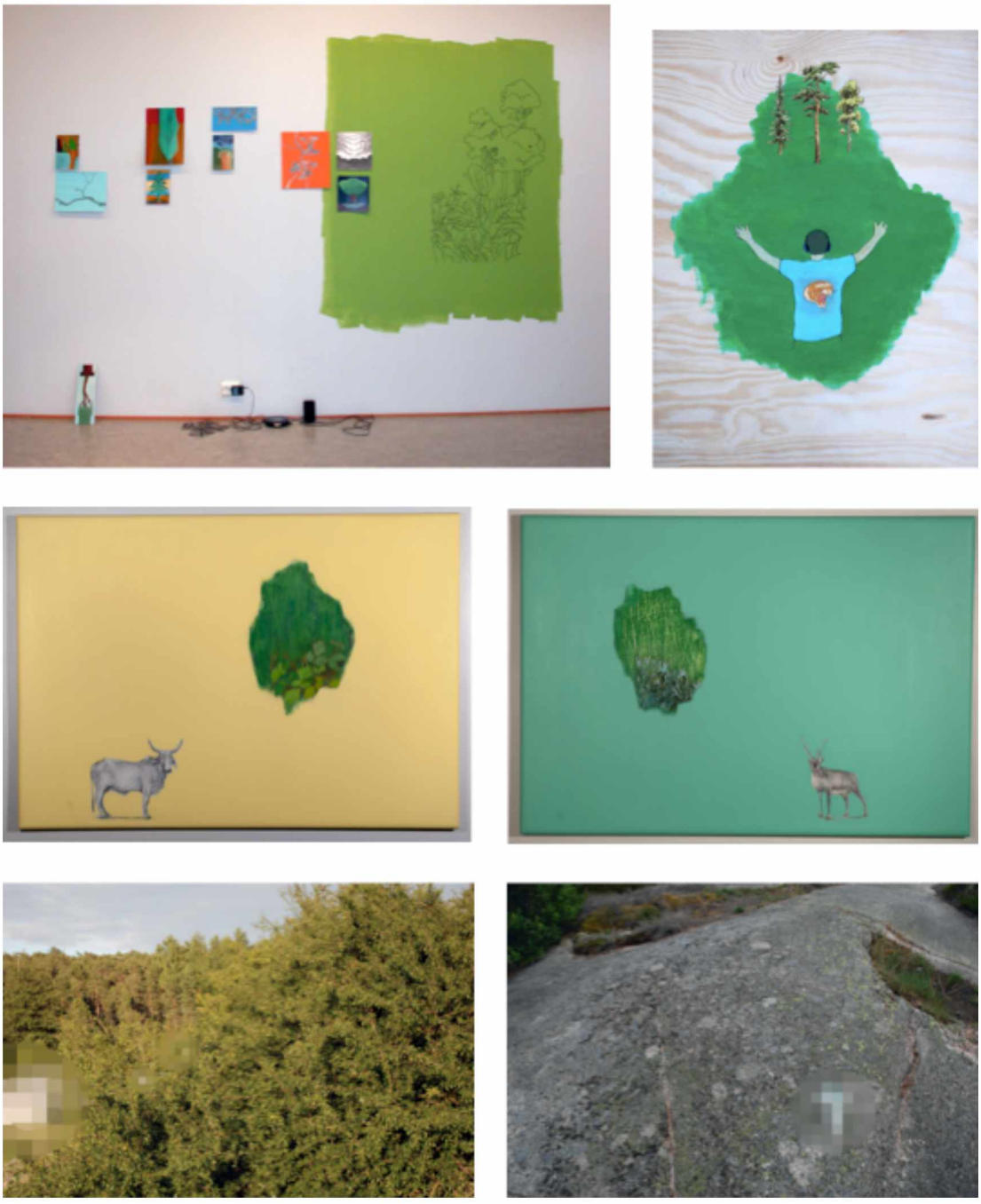

Figure 5.8 Viggo Pedersen's Artworks, Images A to F. Clockwise from top left; **Image A** *Naturmontasje/Nature Montage*; **Image B** *Nature Begjær/Nature Desire*; **Image C** *Rein/Reindeer*; **Image D** *Pil/ Arrow*; **Image E** *Tett Skog/ Thick Forest*; and **Image F** *Ku/Cow*. All images by Viggo Pedersen.

5.4.4 *Nature Montage* and Sami Influences and Identity

While talking about a mixed media art compilation with the working title *Naturmontasje/ Nature Montage* (Figure 5.8, Image A), Viggo reflects on his identity as both Sami and artist. He says *Nature Montage* is based on ideas and associations with geographic locations, nature, borderless travel and changes. Viggo says that this might also be his only artwork that is based on something specifically Sami, such as the colors and theme.

He has used classical intense Sami colors such as red, yellow and blue similar to the colors on some Sami houses in the drawings. However, he finds it hard to classify the artwork as Sami art, because he finds it hard in the first place to define himself as a Sami artist. He says, "I am not just that (a Sami artist). I am an artist who has a Sami affiliation."[146] Though, at the same time he says he often finds it easier to define himself as Sami.

Later in the interview Viggo returns to his Sami background and notes the importance of the Sami language in keeping the culture alive. Although he does not speak Sami himself, his mother did, and he says he would have liked to. Therefore, he sent his son to a Sami speaking daycare in Oslo, hoping that he would speak and understand Sami or at least develop an understanding of Sami culture.

Viggo explains *Nature Montage* from a photo of the artwork on his computer. The art piece was assembled on a gallery wall and consists of nine individual drawings, one large green spot painted directly on the wall decorated with pencil drawings, some three-

[146] Viggo: "Jeg er jo kunstner, men jeg har en samisk tilhørighet."

dimensional paper Woodpeckers on the floor and loud speakers on the floor below the drawings. Viggo says the drawings exemplify various geographical areas such as the Amazon (tropical trees), the Pasvik area in northern Norway (soleie flower), the Arctic (northern dwarf Arctic birch trees), the North (dry tree branches from the North), the Sami (an upside down flower pot based on the Sami view of how a tree grows both ways), and associations between those geographical places. Out of the loud speakers comes twittering from a few particular birds that return to Pasvik annually for the mating season.

Viggo says the artwork represents crossing borders and a minimal sense of belonging, coming to a place for short periods of time and then leaving, and using the resources that are there for a limited time. Viggo explains how birds cross borders freely without belonging to a specific place, as reindeer herding Sami travel between different grazing areas from the Norwegian coast to the Swedish tundra. He says, "I thought of those sorts of things, of not having to deal with borders but rather the place itself…the geographical area." [147]

The concepts behind *Nature Montage* illustrate well Viggo's thoughts on using Sami concepts in his art. He says that he does not use any traditional Sami symbols but says that some of his ideas might refer back to or could be interpreted as Sami.

When asked what his Sami identity means directly for his art, he emphasizes that it means more to him personally as a culture he belongs to, but that his frame of reference (relating to his art) is not close to Sami culture. Viggo says, " If we look at my art in

[147] Viggo: "Og den type tanker hadde jeg med i det arbeidet da. Å slippe å forholde seg til grenser, fordi man forholder seg til steder ikke sant. Geografiske områder mere."

general, it could be that my affection for nature comes from the Sami and an interest in questions about identity." [148] He continues "but I live here and use my frame of reference to things that happen now, and those might be more environmentally conscious."[149]

Similar to *Nature Montage,* Viggo's films use imagery from different geographical locations to create associations. His three main films are titled Kjøttmeis (Great Titmouse), *Den ville skogen* (The Wild Forest) and *Kan vi ikke ha det hyggelig sammen* (Can't We Have a Nice Time Together).[150] Viggo uses the camera on his cell phone to record films and his computer for editing. He uses a split screen technique, showing two or more short videos on the screen at the same time, which together creates a whole image or video experience. He says the movies explore feelings of humor and melancholy as well as other emotions, as do many of his art works, as a way of engaging the viewer.

One of Viggo's most recent works is a digital photo series titled *Natur Anonymisering/ Nature Anonymous* (Figure 5.8, Image D and E) that concerns issues of nature and environmental awareness. He explains that the idea behind the photos is human intervention in nature; the concept is based on how photos of a person who is accused of a crime that are published before trial usually have their faces pixilated to cover their identity. Translating this to nature, he has taken numerous photos that have evidence of human interference in nature, i.e. forest with trail markers etc., and has later

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[148] Viggo: "Så hvis vi ser det generelt, så kan det være affeksjon for naturen. Det har jeg jo fått derfra. Og interessen jeg har akkurat rundt det delen og interessen for identitet spørsmål."
[149] Viggo: "Jeg bor jo her…og bruker liksom mine referanse rammer rundt nå eller ting som skjer, da. Ikke sant, som er kanskje mere miljøvern bevist da."
[150] Viggo Pedersen, http://home.broadpark.no/~viggop/video/videoliste.html.

manipulated the photos by pixilating the part that shows traces of human actions to cover up the evidence, so to speak. He uses this technique to illustrate how nature does not have a voice to defend itself. Furthermore, Viggo explains that some of the photos look nearly like the images people take on vacation, and that illustrates his message as well. They are not supposed to be professional looking nature photography; but rather show nature close up in detail.

When asked if he would like his artworks to be understood in a specific way he says no, because interpretation will vary depending on the personal frame of reference. However he hopes that as a result of experiencing his art, the audience will contemplate nature. And he says that sometimes there might be aspects of in his art that demand a response from the audience such as the Indian sacred cow mentioned above.

5.4.5 Involvement in SDS – the Sami Artist Union

In recent years Viggo has worked actively within Sami artist organizations. He says that he has been a member of the SDS-Sami Artist Union for several years and has also been part of the SDS-Sami Artist Union artistic advisory board and SDG-Sami Artist Center's steering committee, as well as serving on committees for the SDR-Sami Artist Council. He explains that this is political work as well as being important for securing financial support for the Artist Center, the Artist Union and individual artists by negotiating among the various art organizations and with the Norwegian government.

Asked about how he envisions the Sami art world, he emphasizes that there are differences between artists from different generations. He thinks that the first members of

the Sami Artist Union used (or still use) more classical methods such as oil paintings, wood carvings etc. He wonders if they were closer to nature because of the materials they used and where they lived. The later generations tend to work in a different way, not so dependent upon the material base and are rather broad in their artistic concepts. He also says that the SDS-Sami Artist Union includes members from Sweden, Finland and Russia, as well as Norway, which brings together a large variety of artists and many different cultural perspectives, and thereby represents various understandings of what it means to be Sami.

At the end of the interview Viggo confirms that he see himself as indigenous and as an artist who transcends cultural borders. "I look at myself as an artist in a larger context. I do not think of myself as a Sami artist." [151]

Thus, Viggo is a visual artist who centers his ideas around the concept of nature, using a multitude of artistic expressions to convey his ideas. Based on communicating associative concepts, his artwork centers on environmentalism and geographical specificities.

[151] Viggo: "Jeg tenker på meg selv som en kunstner i en større sammenheng, ja. Jeg tenker ikke på meg selv som en samisk kunstner."

5.5 Gjert Rognli

5.5.1 Creative Background: "The art forced itself on me"

Gjert Rognli is a visual artist who works with photography, performance, film, and graphic design. During the last few years Gjert has been a full-time artist after having worked for several years with graphic design, film and media productions and scenography at the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) and the Norwegian National Theatre. Gjert has a broad art education including a Bachelors of Multimedia Systems from Noroff Institutt, and has taken several classes in web and graphic design from Merkantil Institutt, both in Oslo.

During the last few years Gjert has exhibited extensively in Norway and internationally with films, photography and performance, both as an individual artist and as part of the artistic Sami performance duo Daban Da, which he does together with Asbjørn Unor Forsøget. They are both members of SDS- Sami Artist Union.

Some of Gjert's recent shows include solo exhibits at the Sami Artist Center and Fotografiens Hus in Oslo, and with Daban Da at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, *Gierdu* and the Riddu Riđđu Festival 2011.

Gjert lives in downtown Oslo, and the interview takes place on a sunny Saturday afternoon in a bar located close to the National Theater in the city center. Gjert explains that his working career gave him experience with artistic ways of conveying information. He says that he has always tried to avoid becoming an artist because of the insecurities

associated with the profession; however in the end he gave in, and he says, "it was the art that forced itself on me."[152]

5.5.2 Personal Background: "I describe myself as a post modern human"

Gjert is from Manndalen in Kåfjord in northern Norway. He is not from a home that was steeped in the Sami culture. He says, "I describe myself as a post-modern human, meaning that my identity is Norwegian, Sea Sami, Finnish, Russian and Swedish" (Figure 5.9, Images A and B). [153] He says that others may decide which part of him they would like to emphasize in his art. He explains how the Riddu Riđđu festival in Kåfjord strengthened the Sea Sami identity during the 1990s, as it was previously seen as a subgroup in relation to the Sami and Norwegian cultures. Gjert says, "I am from that melting pot, the conflict between the Norwegian and the Sami." [154]

He explains that there was a strong conflict in his village between the Sami and the Norwegian culture, and still is today. The Norwegianization process had been so strong in that area that people did not want to have anything to do with the Sami, including his parents, who do not identify themselves as Sami. One visible sign of the conflict was that all street signs that listed the Sami name for the village used to be shot to pieces for years. However lately they have been left alone.

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[152] Gjert: "Så det var rett og slett kunsten som presset seg innpå meg."
[153] Gjert: "Jeg kategoriserer meg selv om som et postmoderne menneske, og det vil si på en måte at min identitet er både norsk, sjøsamisk, finsk, og russisk og svensk."
[154] Gjert: "Og det der er jo jeg fra, hele den smeltedigelen der, den konflikten mellom det norske og det samiske."

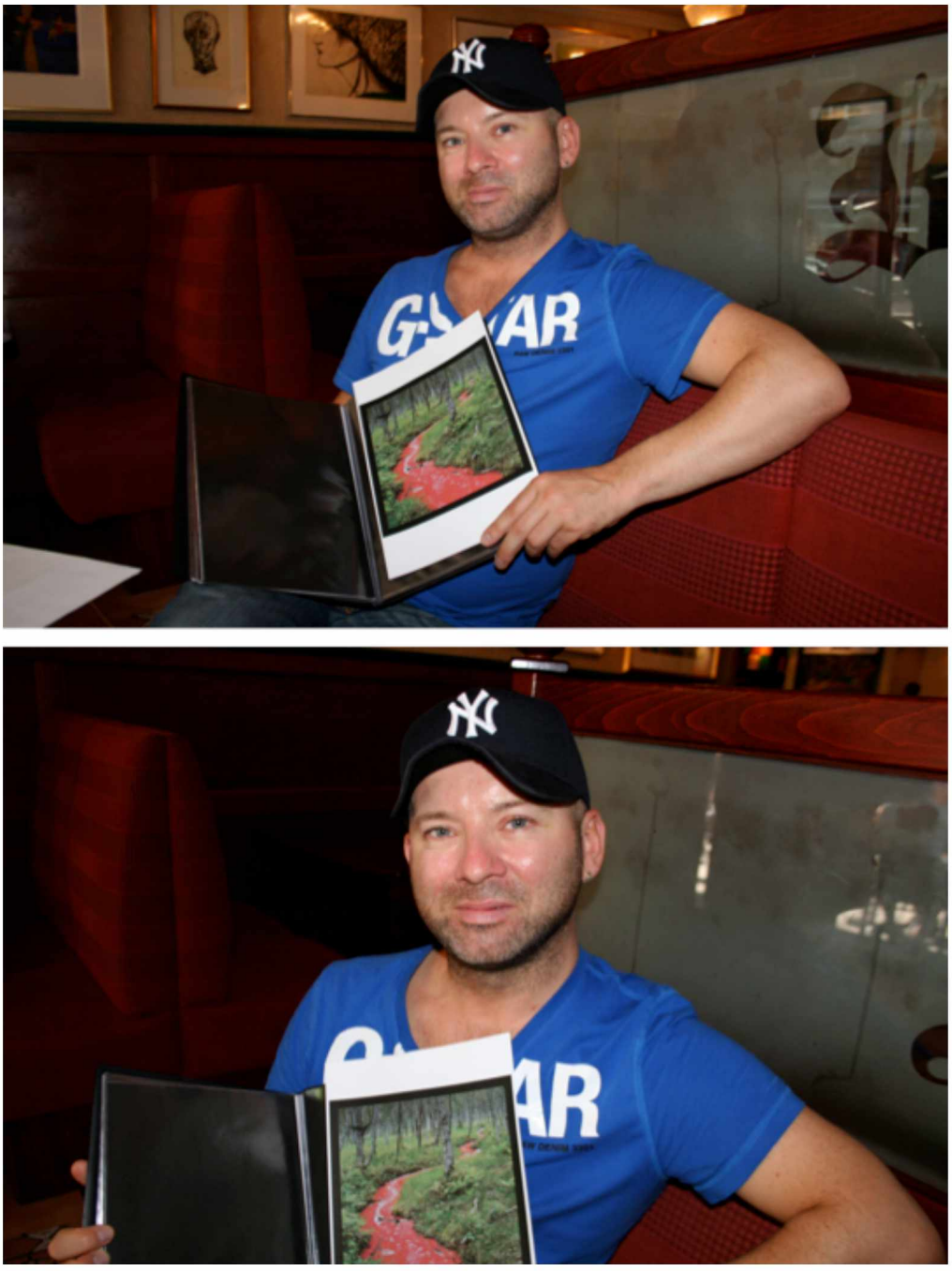

Figure 5.9 Photographs of Artist Gjert Rognli, Images A to B. From top to bottom; **Image A and Image B** Gjert at "Burns" bar in downtown Oslo holding a digitally manipulated photograph from *The Hidden Place* photos series. All images by Birte M. Horn-Hanssen.

5.5.3 Photography and Film Projects

Gjert's main digital photography series are *The Hidden Place, The Forgotten Place,* and *The Mountains.* In his photographs Gjert alternates between documenting realistic scenes as in *The Mountains* series, and staging and digitally manipulating and creating photos as in both *The Forgotten Place, The Hidden Place,* something he also does for photographs created together with his performance partner in Daban Da. The majority of Gjert's photos and films have Sami, Norwegian and English titles.

Gjert explains that the photos in *The Hidden Place* (Figure 5.10, Images A and B) depict a journey into the old Sami religion. He says, "it is in a way a mythological journey into the different spiritual realms the shaman used in the old Sami religion."[155] Gjert explains that the ancient indigenous people in northern Norway would sacrifice to particularly shaped rocks and lakes, which is represented in his photos by parts of mountains and lakes. He says that the photos in *The Hidden Place* capture an animistic world-view and that old joik songs, the traditional folk music of the Sami people, inspired him. He says rather than using traditional Sami symbols such as shaman drums in his art, his artistic expression is modern yet evokes a feeling of being Sami. Gjert said that he wanted those particular photos to convey a sense of energy, mysticism, depth and a feeling of sub-consciousness. The photo series *Hidden Place* was published in 2006 in a book titled *Joik i den gamle samiske relgionen* (Joik in the Old Sami Religion).

[155] Gjert: "Det er på en måte er en mytologisk reise inn i de forskjellige åndsrikene sjamanen brukte i den gamle samiske religionen."

Figure 5.10 Gjert Rognli's Artworks 1, Images A to D. Clockwise from top left; **Image A** and **Image B** Digitally manipulated photos from *The Hidden Place* photo series; **Image C** *The Forgotten Place,* "Transparent Animal"; and **Image D** *The Forgotten Place,* "Come with me to a Secret Place." All images by Gjert Rognli.

Similar to the themes behind the photos in the *The Hidden Place*, Gjert explains his movie *Behind the Silverwidths* as a short story and a surreal journey the viewer takes together with the shaman into the Kingdom of Death. The viewer travels through the shaman's eyes to ask the dead about what humans have to do to get their freedom. Gjert explains that the context of the movie is the strong Christianization of Northern Norway that took place in the 16th century where shamans were burnt alive in order to be rid of them and their religious practice. The movie received praise at the Sami Film Festival in 2007.

In the series *The Forgotten Place* (Figure 5.10, Images C and D) Gjert performs and stages himself, naked or in costumes outside in nature. The photos portray among other things clothed and naked human bodies, and dead and live animals. Gjert says that some of the photos use animals as metaphors to represents animal rights and abuse, and reflections around what animals symbolize in our consumer society. Two of the titles of individual photos are *Transparent Animal* (Figure 5.10, Image D) and *Animal Alpha.* Gjert describes *Animal Alpha* as an image of a naked man without any hair, the hair having been removed to illustrate innocence, who stands outside in an old decaying farm structure holding a goat with a muzzle on a leash. The image implicitly asks who is the leaders or animal alpha.

Other photos in the series could be interpreted to express religious themes. Gjert explains that these photos are not about him; they are fantasy and symbolize a multitude of surrealistic ideas, and could evoke everything from evil and dark thoughts to comical interpretations. Some of the photo titles of images with a possibly religious motif are

Hidden Depth and *Come with me to a Secret Place* (Figure 5.10, Image D), which shows a red clothed figure lying in red liquid in what looks like a casket.

Gjert explains that he has tried to move away from invoking Sami mythology and symbolism in *The Forgotten Place* as he has worked with Sami themes comprehensively through Daban Da. Nevertheless, many of the photos in this series are often associated with Sami culture.

Gjert has also been told that the images portray his personal inner spiritual struggle. He does not identify with this interpretation, and says that he could more easily see the photos being about spiritual and religious struggles within Sami culture. "This is in a way new-Shamanism, which appears as a contradiction to Christianity and Læstadianism, which have a religious stronghold in Northern Norway. So, it could be that I do not work with a personal religious fight, but perhaps work with a symbolic struggle that is about a struggle for the Sami." [156]

The Forgotten Place series includes a film with the same title that was part of the National Geographic Indigenous Film Festival in 2010. *The Forgotten Place* photos and movie were first exhibited at the Sami Artist Center in August 2010 together with a performance piece in which Gjert was dressed in red cloth and acted out surrealistic statements in relation to a pool of red liquid placed in the exhibit gallery.

The Mountains series stands in strong contrast to the other photo series (Figure 5.11, Images A to E). It is a documentation of the dying Sea Sami way of life and identity

[156] Gjert: "På en måte ny-sjamanisme… som kommer på en måte kontra kristnedommen, som læstadianismen, som har hatt godt rotfeste, og har vel fremdeles det i Nord-Norge liksom. Altså, at det på en måte kan være, jeg jobber ikke personlig med en religiøs kamp, men kanskje jeg jobber med en symbolsk kamp som handler om en samisk kamp."

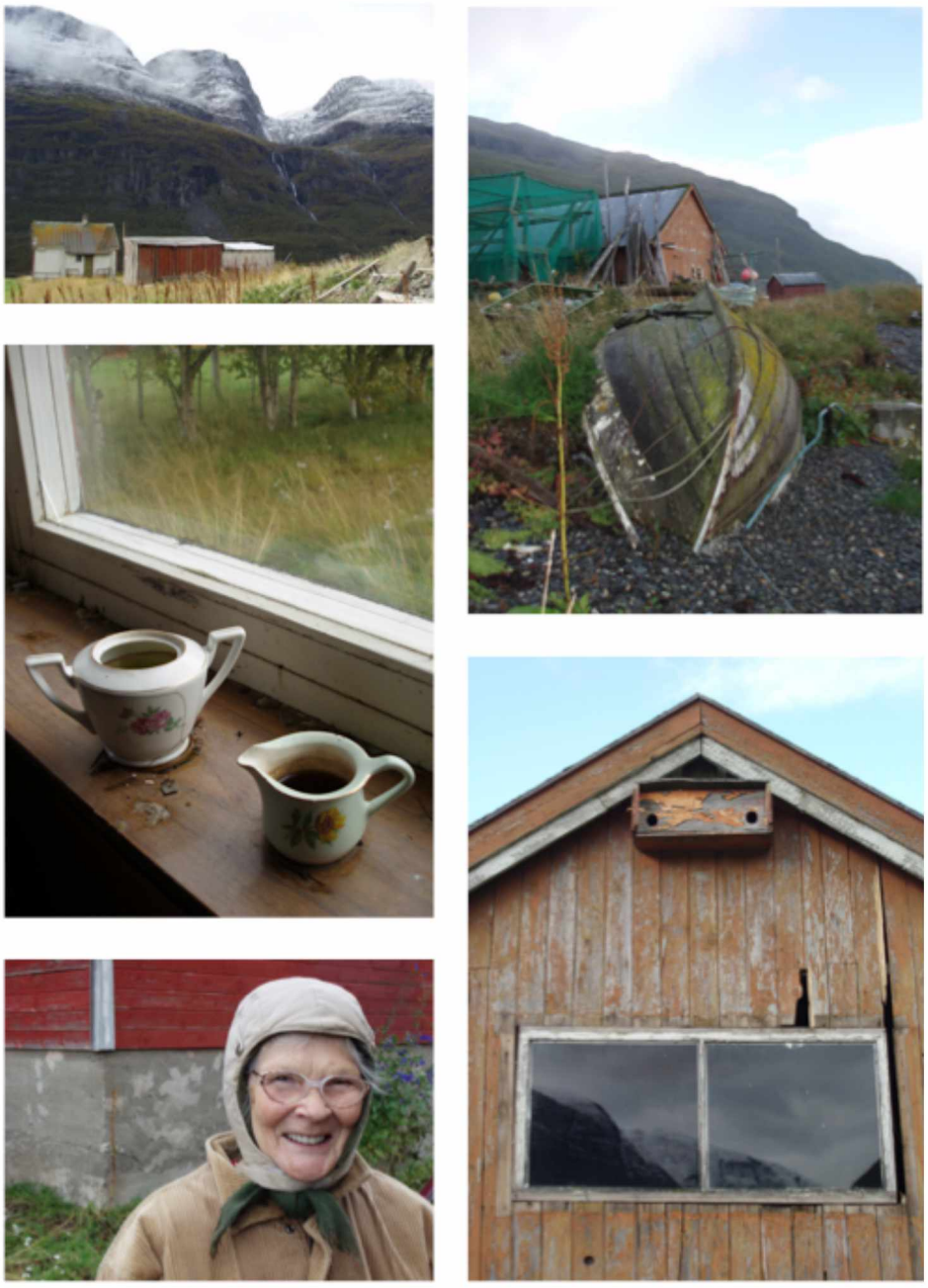

Figure 5.11 Gjert Rognli's Artworks 2, Images A to E. Clockwise from top left. **Images A, B, C, D, and E.** All images from *The Mountains/Mæn fjællan e de samme*. No individual titles. All images by Gjert Rognli.

that was built up after the Second World War. Gjert explains that after the Second World War there was a new era for the Sea Sami culture based around similar looking new houses, barns and boats that were built or funded by the Norwegian government, as all previously existing structures were burnt as part of Nazi Germany's scorched earth tactic as the German troops retreated in the last months of the war. However Gjert says that era of Sea Sami life is diminishing because of industrialization and mechanization of fishing; and thus the area is experiencing a large population drain and physical decay. Gjert says *The Mountains* images are a political statement about these conditions and all the changes that come with them. "All the traditions which one could define as Sea Sami are gone."[157] Images from *The Mountains* series will be published in a political book about Sea Sami rights and culture in fall 2011, and the photos series was last shown at Fotografiens Hus in October 2011.

In addition to the two movies mentioned, above Gjert has also produced the *Spiritual Kiss-Vuoinnalas cummá.* The *Spiritual Kiss* is about homosexuality in the Sami population, a group that Gjert says should be highlighted and seen as a positive resource in Sami areas, instead of ostracizing them and their families. Gjert explains that he has been told that old shamans were often homosexuals, because that was an occupation outside of the traditional Sami division of labor, and a role that a person who did not fit within the norms of conduct at the time could embrace. He says that the movie tries to illustrate this mercy that appears to have previously existed towards homosexuality in Sami society.

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[157] Gjert: "Alle de tradisjonene blir borte som kan defineres som sjøsamiske."

5.5.4 Artistic Methods: Inspirations and Resources in Northern Norway

Gjert says he works intuitively and does not think of politics or religious issues when he creates art, but instead thinks about "what is visually beautiful."[158] He explains that his ideas are transformed through a thought process later. Gjert says, "I work very graphically. If it works esthetically and graphically, and it looks interesting and exciting, then the explanation of what it is comes after, and not before I am done with the artworks."[159] Gjert says, he does not want to say too much about the interpretation of his art, but would rather allow the individual and his or her context to attribute meaning or feelings to his art.

Gjert says that some of his ideas and interpretations are inspired by old Sami words and literature, Sami poems and music, which he tries to transform into new art. He says "it is important that new voices are given some space… in literature, in art, in language, which may disseminate Sami art in new ways." [160]

Additionally he explains that several of his ideas are filmed and photographed at his family's property in Kåfjord/Manndalen, a place to which he feels a strong connection and where he has access to rivers, trees, farming machinery, animals and help from family members. Soon after the interview Gjert was planning to travel back North to fill his family's old farmhouses with red liquid to stage new photos.

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[158] Gjert: "Hva er vakkert."
[159] Gjert: "Så jeg jobber veldig grafisk. Det her funker estetisk, det funker bra, det er spennende, det er interessant. Så på en måte så kan faktisk forklaringen kom etterpå, hva som jeg har ment med verket."
[160] Gjert: "Nei, nei, ikke sant. Det er viktig på en måte at det kommer ny stemmer inn som på en måte…i litteratur, i kunst, i språk som kan videreformidle kanskje samisk kunst på ny måter."

In sum, Gjert is a versatile artist, staging himself in his own photographs and films, and in his performances with Daban Da. He uses realistic and surrealistic imagery to create political, historical, and spiritual experiences.

5.6 Summary of the Artists

To summarize, the artists above all explicitly identify a strong connection to Northern Norway, either because they are from there or have strong family ties to the area. They are all members of the Sami Artist Union and are either actively involved with the organization or grateful for its artistic support. The artists all have extensive artistic educational backgrounds and have exhibited their work both nationally and internationally. Bente Geving represents the first generation of fine art Sami artists who became active in the 1970s at a time of strong political renewal within the Sami political movement, a time Hansen sees as a new epoch within Sami art. Geir Tore Holm, Gjert Rognli and Viggo Pedersen are three men in their late-40s who represent what one could call the second generation of fine arts Sami artists. They all explore and mix various forms of artistic media, and have experienced the intensity of the formation of the collective Sami identity in the 1980s; issues they all say they have explored extensively within their art. In addition, both Holm and Rognli are from the village of Kåfjord in Troms County, a place that has experienced strong collective awareness of its mixed and/or opposing Sami and Norwegian identities since the early 1980s. Joar Nango represents the new and young generation of Sami artists that expresses a more

comfortable relationship with their Sami identity. His focus is on asking questions and opening up existing definitions of Sami identity to new and fluid answers.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The analysis will explore how to unlock the visual and the non-visual in the art works. The artworks will be analyzed within the framework of visual culture, voicing cultural understandings rooted in both the public and private spheres. The analysis will also underscore the artists' fluid ideas of Sami identity. The artist profiles with both photographs of the artists and the artworks, and the historical, social and political context are used to explore in detail contemporary visual Sami art as presented by Geving, Holm, Nango, Pedersen and Rognli.

6.1 Geving's Photo Series: *Anna, Inga and Ellen* and *Margit Ellinor*

Bente Geving's interview, the photo of her posing with a framed photo of her great-grandparents and some of her artistic works together reveal a personal history of a family's generational ties and a matrilineal connection of love and Sami heritage. Specifically the photo series named after her grandmother Ellen and her sisters, and the photos titled Margit Ellinor after her mother exemplify these concepts.

The photos of Anna, Inga and Ellen are in black and white and document the domestic activities and daily life of three elderly women (Figure 5.2, Images A, B, C and G). The four photos included here show the three sisters with beautifully done hair, dresses and white shoes sitting on a bed; another shows them enjoying themselves in their living room, two of them watching the other sisters dancing; the third shows two women working in the kitchen, and the last is a photo of one of them in a traditional Sami costume. All photos reveal a sense of intimacy, perhaps because the women were

photographed in their own home, but also their faces suggest a sense of love and familiarity among the subjects and between them and the photographer; a closeness that perhaps only a person who knew them would be able to capture. The photos evoke a sense of being invited into an intimate moment or looking at a personal family photo album.

The *Margit Ellinor* series stands in sharp contrast with intense colors, and rather than people, the images portray items (Figure 5.2, Images D and F). We assume from the title that the photos are about Margit Ellinor; even though we do not see her in the pictures, there is a strong and intimate sense of her presence. One photo shows a table with a white crocheted tablecloth decorated with a plate portraying a Sami woman in a traditional Sami costume with her children, a pink porcelain cup, a flower painted wine class, a copper bowl, a portrait of a woman and a child and a blue glass vase in addition to the photo of Anna, Inga and Ellen sitting on a bed arranged with a red napkin in front. The other photo is a close-up of another perspective of the table arrangement centered on a porcelain angel surrounded with two porcelain birds and in the background a Sami doll and a white porcelain miniature house. The photos have the quality of being portraits of items, which as a stylistic form underlines the items' personal significance to their owner. The items are in themselves symbols, modern items eliciting associations to traditional Sami folklore with the Sami plate and doll, and to the domestic and female with the cup and saucers, porcelain figurines and vases. The strong colors in the items and thus in the photos render a live and vibrant atmosphere to the images, which is intriguingly

juxtaposed with the arrangements of memories, a person and a past that are slowly fading because of Alzheimer's.

6.2 Individualized History: A Shift Away from Visualized Collective Identity

The issue of Sami identity is paramount in Bente's images. In the interview Geving anchors her Sami connection to family members who spoke Sami and in her own personal recognition that her Sami heritage has become an important part of her identity and her artistic works, both of which exemplify the official definition who and what is Sami. The two photo series were not made to create continuity within a personal exploration of her background. However, seen together they seem to uncover from where and whom Geving comes, not in terms of place but more from a genealogical perspective, looking at identity through two generations and various spheres of influence.

Moreover, Geving's images offer an individualized perspective of history and identity, even though the images were created in the mid-1980s at a time of intense revitalization of the ethno-political debate when the focus within the Sami political movement was on creating a broad sense of cultural collective identity both within Sami communities and outwards. Collective identity here is defined as in Steve Leuthold's concept of indigenous expression as outlined in Chapter 2. Leuthold also argues that within indigenous cultures there is a "collective identification," meaning that indigenous cultures have certain cultural traits, traditional or contemporary, that when expressed artistically offer a sense of shared identity[161] both within and towards one another.[162]

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[161] Leuthold, 5.

Broad defined, indigenous aesthetic expression could include Sami traditional costumes and thus when used signify individual Sami identity, and at the same time affirming their common cause/identity/shared heritage. This type of collective identity is arguably portrayed in some of the images used on the Sami Parliament in Norway's website.[163]

However, in Geving's photos on the other hand, except for the one photo of Anna in a Sami costume there is nothing in the photos, at least from an outsider's perspective that indicates or symbolizes that these women are Sami or are meant to represent a cultural group. We know from Geving's interview that the elderly women did view themselves as Sami. However, the images allude to Norwegian daily life in the post World War II period. On the other hand, these women have Sea Sami heritage; thus the photos also arguably provide an insiders' view of a few Sea Sami elders, creating a visual representation and a personal encounter with a generation that experienced strong Norwegianization policies most of their lives.

Moreover, the late American writer Susan Sontag, reflecting on the scientific but selective value of photos, argued that by being photographed, a person, concept or an event becomes immortal and acquires a heightened level of importance it would not otherwise enjoy, and that documentation thus becomes part of "a system of information."[164] That is, the subject being photographed is recorded for the future. Yet photos represent selective memory, what is recorded and photographed is remembered, and knowledge is obtained about it. That which is not photographed may be lost. Thus

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[162] Leuthold, 1.
[163] Sami Parliament in Norway, http://www.samediggi.no/artikkel.aspx?AId=4267&MId1=3376&back=1.
[164] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977),11 and 156.

the photos in the *Anna, Inga, and Ellen* are historic documentation of a time, place and *a few individuals.*

In terms of a photo-historical perspective, Geving's work is arguably post-colonial. Andrea N. Walsh posit in her article *Visualizing Histories: Experiences of Space and Place in Photographs by Greg Staats and Jeffrey Thomas* that in Canada, First Nations people in earlier times were often depicted in images as representations of certain collectives and/or Nations and indentified by their cultural association rather than by their names. Walsh argues that in Canada such photos speak more to the narrative of colonial expansion, the growth of national and provincial economies and the assimilation of aboriginal people than to the individuals portrayed.[165] This phenomenon also occurred in Scandinavia at the turn of the 20th century, when Scandinavian photographers such as Axel Lindahl and Anders Beer Wilse photographed the Sami as part of an agenda to photograph the 'modern' Norway, often arranged in family portrait configuration in front of their lavvus, and identified only as Sami at a roughly given geographical location.[166]

Walsh argues that these early images can be used to contrast with current photography because these early portrayals of aboriginal people have "remained a part of popular non-Native experience and understanding concerning aboriginal people to this day."[167] This argument could also be made in a Norwegian context. Although there has been a multitude of portrayals of the Sami since that time, the early photos have to a

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[165] Andrea N. Walsh, "Visualizing Histories: Experiences of Space and Place in Photographs by Greg Staats and Jeffrey Thomas," *Visual Studies* 17 (2002): 37-38.
[166] Norwegian National Library, "Digital photo collection of Sami by Axel Lindahl and Anders Beer Wilse," http://www.nb.no/cgibin/galnor/gn_sok.sh?context=0&offset=0&skjema=0&type=e&tittel=samer&Start=S%F8k&fm=1&limit=20&user_offset=1.
[167] Walsh, 38.

certain extent remained the official Norwegian cultural understanding of the Sami, largely because of their long-term use in education and museum exhibits. Furthermore this ethnically-focused portrayal has to a certain extent been revitalized in the last decade in new museums exhibits in Norway, however now with a new focus on the collective identity and an ethno-political agenda emanating from within the Sami themselves.[168]

Conversely, Geving's individualized and intimate focus in the images, as well as the name of the photo series, contrasts starkly with the colonial or the collective identity-focused portrayal of the Sami. Rather, the focus is on the domestic, female and personal, so that the photos depict not what outsiders might associate with a more homogenous understanding of the Sami, but an insider's heterogeneous knowledge of the many aspects of an individual's way of life and interactions.

Therefore it could be argued that these individually focused photos together with Bente's anecdotes, add a new and personal layer to the already existing knowledge of the time period. Geving has, by photographing these three women in 1985, added meaning, complexity, and value to a time, place and identity that would perhaps otherwise be forgotten or overlooked. Thus, when contextualized, these photos offer glimpses and complex understandings of a life in between several spheres of influence, and they depict an intimate discussion of identity.

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[168] Lorenz Khazaleh, "Etniske selvsentrerte museeer?" *University of Oslo Website*, November 27, 2008, News section, http://www.uio.no/forskning/tverrfak/culcom/nyheter/2008/christensen.html.

6.3 Celebration and Acknowledgement of Cultural Heritage

Consequently, even though Bente is part of the first generation of artists that were politically active in the 1970s, her work is not about fighting for recognition but arguably more a personal celebration and analysis of family members, daily life, cultural heritage and background, as is evident in Geving's statement about her larger family "we are Sami," as wells as in the photos of three old but strong, dancing, laughing and self-sustaining women. It tells of an understated pride in a family's heritage, a heritage that should be celebrated rather than forgotten and hidden, but not simplified either.

Furthermore, the table arrangements in the *Margit Ellinor* series remind one of a table set for a celebration or a party. By capturing it, Geving emphasizes and visualizes a desire to celebrate and share parts of her mother's identity and past that have for most of her mother's life been carefully put out of sight and downplayed in front of others.

6.4 Contested and Negotiated Place, Space and Identity in Rognli's Photographs

The Sea Sami way of life is also a theme in Gjert Rognli's *The Mountain* series (Figure 5.10), which is displayed in full on Rognli's webpage.[169] The photos depict close up details of old fishing nets and utensils; inside and outside of crumbling farm structures, current house interiors and decorations; decaying boats and fishing equipment stored on land; large fjord landscapes with tall mountains, waterfalls, and Rognli's parents. The photos included in his artist profile show a farm in the field set in front of a monumental mountain with snow covered peaks reaching up into the white sky (Figure

[169] Gjert Rognli, http://home.no/gjert/.

5.10, Image A); a close up of a decaying barn with the reflection of the mountains in the windows (Figure 5.10, Image C); a window with an old flower-decorated milk mug and vase (Figure 5.10, Image E); his mother (Figure 5.10, Image D) and rotting fishing boats on land (Figure 5.10, Image B).

The aforementioned article by Walsh on analysis of visual culture in Canada offers guidance for analyzing themes within *The Mountai*ns' series. Walsh discusses the issue of place and space in the work of the two urban aboriginal artists Greg Staats and Jeffrey Thomas. Walsh notes that the artists use specific physical places to create "ideas and concepts of resistance to dominant narratives of colonial and post-colonial history, as well as renewal of personal and cultural strength" as part of an investigation into their identity.[170] The two artists, by bringing in personal memories and historical relations create photographs "that take on the curious role of (being) nodal points referring both to memories of the past while simultaneously providing the viewer with glimpses of present realities for the artists."[171] Specifically in the photo series titled *Memory Landscape,* Thomas photographs various urban places that incorporate temporal and geographical frameworks in order to explore how the same place can be experienced differently by two generations of Iroquoian (Canadian First Nation group). Walsh notes the images also pose to the viewers questions about what that space and place mean to them.[172]

At first glance for an outsider *The Mountains* photos depict beautiful cultural and natural landscapes, scenery that Norwegians can easily recognize and identify with. The

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[170] Walsh, 40.
[171] Walsh, 41.
[172] Walsh, 40.

landscape, fjord, boats, houses and people in the photos are what Walsh would call 'tangible'[173] objects, and are physical representations of the place. However Rognli's explanation of the historical cultural conflicts between Sami and other Norwegians, and the development of the farming and fishing industries after the Second World War, along with the subsequent economic and cultural declines complicates the first impression.

The dominant understanding of the post-colonial history of the Sami is that their rights and cultural understanding have been increasingly understood and accepted by the Norwegian state since the 1980s even though there are still some unresolved issues. The official Norwegian understanding of fishing is that Norway is one 'fishing nation', whereby the country is seen as a whole without any special cultural and local rights.[174] Therefore, Sea Sami fishing rights are highly contested issues. Ragnar Nilsen's analysis presented in chapter 4 of the conflicts surrounding the Sea Sami fishing rights and the Norwegian government's historical and present unfavorable handling of small scale fishing rights paralleled with the increasing demands and awareness of Sea Sami rights and identity complicate Rognli's images and their objects.

Nilsen outlines several factors that have led to decreased fishing in Sea Sami areas; overfishing far out at sea that has reduced the tonnage of fish near the coast and in the fjords; assimilation and discrimination policies prior to the 1980s that resulted in difficulties for Sea Sami people forwarding asserting their fishing rights; the Norwegian authorities' favored support for specialized agriculture equipment for people in the Sea

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[173] Walsh, 40.
[174] Norwegian Minsitry of Fishery, http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/fkd/dok/nouer/2006/nou-2006-16/4/1.html?id=392161.

Sami area, rather than fishing tools resulted in Sami favoring other occupations than fishing; and the official policy of focusing on large quotas in rationing fishing instead of small scale fishing operations.[175] This contextual background, coupled with what Walsh sees as the 'intangible' in photographs such as knowledge and spirit[176] and potentially history, makes the objects in the images at the same time symbols of the past and references to present situation.

We know from the interview with Rognli that the images in *The Mountains* are situated at his birthplace Manndalen in Kåfjord, a place to which he says he feels a strong connection, visits often and is part of his reality. However, Rognli no longer lives in Manndalen, and seen as a whole, the photo series gives a sense of someone who is back visiting and looking at a place he used to know. The objects in the images evoke some of the same intimate and familiar feelings as do some of Geving's photos: a smiling woman who seems to know the photographer and intimate details of a house such as a worn staircase and used coffee cup, details that seem to have more meaning than meets the eye. Contrastingly, familiarity is noticeably absent in the French photographer Celine Clanet's current project on portrayal of people in the Sami community Maze.[177] Thus, it is obvious that Rognli wants to tell a story, show the beauty, create a memory, remember, and preserve what is still left and familiar to him before it is too late.

Through the images one senses that the artist knows that the place is part of his identity and history, but the place has changed and it means something different for his

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[175] Nilsen, 72.
[176] Walsh, 40.
[177] Celine Clanet, "Maze project," http://www.celinette.com/ENG-index-maze.html.

generation than for his parents. The portraits of Rognli's elderly parents document that people still live there: they are the objects that indicate present life, though their age indicates that this may no longer be a viable place, as there are no people present in the landscapes nor are there any images of children. The crumbling boats and abandoned farmhouses tell that at one point this was a thriving area; however that era seems to have changed or ended. The background context complicates what one sees in the images and renders the boats, houses, and rotten, unused fishing equipment symbols of what people once did in the area, symbols of what people no longer do. The objects signify the local connection to the place, and they visualize the history and politics that have affected the place. More specifically, the images visualize the importance of local and indigenous cultures' dependency on traditional occupations and the local material base for its survival and identity. Rognli said as much when he stated that the traditions that one could define as Sea Sami are gone. Thus, the ways in which the images are styled and focused indicate that a person with an intimate and particular cultural knowledge of the place, who knows what has been lost, took these photographs.

Thus the images also could be seen as contributing to the debate about renewal and awareness of the Sea Sami identity with emphasis on what Rognli might define as its cultural strength. By including certain objects, some biographical, others not, Rognli has emphasized what he sees as important and what should be preserved, renewed or incorporated into the identity debate. Therefore the images are inputs into the complexity of Sami identity and/or the Sea Sami way of life.

Moreover, the lack of obvious Sami symbolism in Rognli's work could also allude to the issue of assimilation policies and Norwegianzation. For an outsider the images, especially some of the large mountain scenes resemble paintings from the National romantic era within Norwegian art history as well as evoking thoughts of the Norwegian coast, northern areas, and fjords dotted with picturesque farms, rather than anything Sami. However, what appears to be Norwegian is to a certain extent Sami given the assimilation that has taken place, and one feels that Rognli is exploring this complex imagery of cultural symbols. The images produce multiple meanings that imply the diversity and various experiences that are localized in one place depending upon who is looking, and what one is looking for.

The contextual background thus renders the objects in the photographs symbols of a contested place and a visualization of the present and its history. *The Mountains'* images arguably challenge the dominant understanding of the Norwegian state as a prosperous homogenous fishing nation and the post-colonial narrations of the collective Sami situation by personalizing and visualizing how a place, its people, and their rights are excluded from those narratives. Rognli navigates through and between different understandings of history and identity of place, and the parallel, conflicting and/or intersecting histories of local and national politics, Norwegian and Sami culture, collective and personal identity, and urban outsider and knowledgeable insider's perspectives.

6.5 Poetic Experiences as Political Expressions in Holm's Video Work

Several similar themes contextualized in Geving and Rognli's photos series can be recognized in Geir Tore Holm's movies *Right to Land and Water* and *Summer Solstice 2007,* and in his photo series *Wood Images* (Figure 5.4, Images A, B and C). Holm is articulate in explaining that his art focuses on the non-material, political, informational value, use of natural resources and a sense of place. Thus some of Walsh's analytical concepts that were applied to Rognli's art could also be used for Holms' work.

Moreover, the previously mentioned dominant post-colonial understanding of Sami's increased cultural rights and cultural understanding, exemplified with the creation of the Sami Parliament is applicable here. Finally, the official Norwegian understanding of Norway as one 'fishing nation', whereby the country is seen as a whole without any special cultural and local rights is also applicable here, in addition the official Norwegian understanding of Norway as one energy nation (oil, natural gas, hydro) is also appropriate for the analysis of Holm's artistic works,

As the title indicates, the movie the *Right to Land and Water* addresses a highly politicized and conflicted issue. The movie (and its stills)[178] show a man working in the woods, chopping down trees with a chain saw, preparing the wood for drying and taking a coffee break by the fire. The setting is in a beautiful natural landscape with tall mountains, and seemingly endless green forests on a sunny day with clear blue sky. The artist introduces the movie as an artistic examination of the Finnmark's Act based on several interviews by people who are affected by or who have opinions about it, such as

[178] I have unfortunately not been able to watch *Right to Land and Water*, however I have seen several stills as published in the book *Hotel Polar Capital* (pages 13- 19) and what I have been able find online.

managers, artists, lawyers and users of the woods, all voiced through one man working in the forest, Holm's father.[179] The text, that is, the man's narrative, is published in its entirety and translated to English in the newly released book *Hotel Polar Capital*.

To understand the significance of Holm's individualized focus on the man as a narrator of several different viewpoints, it is important to highlight certain aspects of the Finnmark's Act. In their explanation of the Finnmark's Act, Norwegian authorities state that the Sami, as a collective and individually have through established custom and immemorial usage certain existing rights to use the land in Finnmark. However the law is ethnically neutral and gives extended land use to all residents of the Finnmark County. The explanation emphasizes that rather than ethnicity, individuals' positions and interests are taken into consideration, in consultation with the Sami Parliament, when deciding the right to land use. However certain activities are exempt from the law, such as land/water issues related to salt-water fishing, mining and oil exploration.[180]

To analyze *Right to Land and Water* the video work will be viewed as a poetic experience. In the aforementioned article, Walsh points out that the idea of looking at something as an experience in terms of artistic presentation is an approach that enhances the understanding of photography, or in this case a video work. Walsh quotes the visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards and states, "the viewer has a space and is conscious of

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[179] Hilde Methi and Kristin Tårnesvik, introduction to Geir Tore Holm's "Right to Land and Water" in *Hotel Polar Capital* (Kirkenes, Norway: Sami Art Festival 2008–2011, 2011), 13.
[180] Norwegian Government, "Information about the Finnmark's Act", http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/jd/dok/Veiledninger_brosjyrer/2005/fakta-om-finnmarksloven.html?id=88240.

the ambiguity of the image which allow access to the experience of a situation in all its complexity rather than the pretence of surface understanding."[181]

Accordingly, the individual focus in Holm's *Right to Land and Water* arguably not only personalizes and individualizes a latent issue, but also creates an experience by exploring the law's implications and contradictions. Arguably by presenting several voices and opinions through one man's poetic recitation[182] Holm has artistically constructed a presentation of an issue within the authority of oral tradition. The viewer receives several perspectives on an issue presented as a coherent whole, even though the narrative is at times rather incoherent and even conflicted. Statements express discontentment, traditional ecological and local knowledge, a feeling of change and loss among other concepts. Some examples are; "That's just the way it is. You don't eat dried meat in January, and you don't eat dried meat in June either. Then you eat salmon …This is changing- everything is changing. The very moment you go to the frozen-goods counter rather than into the mountains, everything changes…To a great extent, this is also about human compassion…I thought the ocean belonged to all of us and that the land had no private owners." These statements and thereby the man's narrative suggest associations to oral history and the importance of preserving, documenting, voicing, and acknowledging local knowledge and understanding.

On the other hand, the *Right to Land and Water* might also be a metaphor for question the idea of understanding contested issues or the law literally, as what is

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[181] Walsh, 48.
[182] Geir Tore Holm, "Vuoigatvuodat eatnamiidda ja čáziide / The Right to Land and Water" in *Hotel Polar Capital*, ed. Hilde Methi and Kristin Tårnesvik (Kirkenes, Norway: Sami Art Festival 2008–2011, 2011), 14-19.

narrated in the video work by the man is not the man's personal opinions but a conglomeration of opinions. Thus, Holm explores the individualized and subjective emphasis in the law, which is usually understood as the objective voice in a matter of conflict, along with the various subjective understandings of the right and use of land and its cultural implications. However, in the oral statements expressed through the man there is also an implicit feeling of historical and present colonial sentiment, which arguably is inherent in the law as written. It is perhaps exactly this that Holm wants the viewer to experience: how the application of this law is subjective, complex and confusing, and to ask questions about what one sees in the video: who does nature belong to; what are its just uses; and what are humans' role and relations' to it.

Thus again, the contextual background renders tangible objects (such as the mountains, forest, wood, and the man coupled with the conflicting voices and visual symbols of the place itself) a contested political space of land rights, historical changes, interconnected local knowledge, and official policies. The artwork thus visualizes the present situation as well as history. Additionally, the man's use of and relationship to nature strays away from romanticism and instead raises questions regarding human ecology and the importance of the use of local material base for an indigenous culture's survival and identity. However, the identity issue is presented as more than just the Sami' fight for the right to land and water, as there is no clear indication of the specific cultural connection for the viewer (especially with an outsiders perspective) other than Holm's background. Rather the video work suggests associations with Holm's perception of the

world as something that is closely interrelated and understandable only by references to its whole.

Thus the *Right to Land and Water* arguably challenges the narrative that by instituting the Finnmark's Act, Norwegian authorities have finally remedied historical injustices. Instead the law has rephrased the injustices, as it does not give the Sami any further explicit rights to land and water. In addition the movie implicitly questions the one-sided ethno-political focus on these issues and the Norwegian authorities' decision on the issue, and it explores understandings of the subjective versus objective and specific versus generic. Thus Holm presents a poetic visualized continuous experience, however fragmented by the man's narration, showing us that the situation is not whole without including conflicting and various individualized perspectives. As such the artwork exemplifies how art is an expression of what is created in between individuals, perspectives, and cultures and how this leads to innovative ways of investigating an issue.

In contrast Holm's movie *Summer Solstice 2007* is not a personified experience; it has no narration and is silent. The movie shows a journey around the gas production facility on Melkøya in northern Norway. The stills from the movie show landscape scenes, with the island and its production facilities centered in the middle of the screen, framed by dark blue ocean and light blue summer sky. The sunlight is bright as day in certain stills[183] and more dim or faded in others. As the boat tours around the island, the sun at the end is facing the camera, blinding the camera with its bright rays, which darkens the facility into a black structure. The sun dips behind the gas production plant

[183] Several stills from the movie are published in the exhibit catalog *Background* (2008), 39.

radiating a halo around the building causing beautiful shimmers and reflections in the water.

The landscape is northern, and the sun's position and the title of the movie indicate that this movie takes place close to the Arctic. Rather than focusing on an individualized perspective Holm approaches the use of natural resources with beauty and metaphors. The poetic beauty of combining the sunlight, the landscape and the sun's reflections and shadows with the monstrous production facility creates an experience wherein the viewer is part of the journey, and is introduced to several angles of both the physical realities presented and complex forces and interests at play. Metaphorically the tour gives a sense of reining something in, be it animals, a place or an issue. Thus, the journey literally centers the issue of non-renewable exploration; one cannot avoid facing the natural gas plant. Thus the experience of the place, its structures and its locality are important for contextualizing the content of the movie.

Additionally, the visual experience one has when watching *Summer Solstice 2007* creates questions such as why was this presented to us as a journey; who is observing (filming), what is the context in which this production plant exists, where are the humans in this context, how is this production plant experienced by the people who live in this area; who owns the natural resources and the plant, and why are the plant and surrounding issues framed is such a poetic way?

Except for the contextualization, which roots the issue at hand in a specific place in northern Norway, the lack of other symbols such as something specifically Sami opens up wider interpretations making it applicable to many areas of the world, arguably

making *Summer Solstice 2007* a generic response to a universal issue facing many different peoples and nations. However, the centering of the gas plant also indicates that the person who is filming knows what has changed in the landscape. Rather than portraying the pristine Arctic environment to show what would be lost as a result of potential natural resource exploration, which is the more common approach of environmental photography exemplified by photographers such as the American Subhankar Banerjee,[184] Holm focuses on the change or the instrument that causes the change (climate change) and/or conflict itself. Nonetheless, Banerjee's work is described as based in informative realism, dynamic composition and sublime beauty, something that could also be said about Holm's art.[185] However the difference is the artistic representation of developments in the Arctic.

Furthermore, the lack of people in the video might in itself be a visual metaphor. A quotation from Peter Jull's essay about politics on sustainable development in the Arctic perhaps frames the issue at hand the best; it is about the "invisible indigenous peoples in national hinterland vis-à-vis national and international development policies."[186] Thus, taken literally, Holm might have deliberately excluded the human's presence from the video work to underscore human's (non) position in the debate about natural resource development.

The exhibit catalog for which the video work was first shown *Background* describes the movie as "a political account of exploitation of natural resources in northern

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[184] Subhankar Banerjee, http://www.subhankarbanerjee.org/index.html.
[185] Suzaan Boettger, "Global Warnings," *Art in America* June/ July 6 (2008):154-161.
[186] Jull, 22-23.

Norway, where the question of ethnically defined rights to these resources is central."[187] Seen together with Holm's text *Blood and Gas,* also in the *Background* catalog, it seems obvious that this is about how authorities and capitalists have exploited natural resources that are seen as having traditionally belonged to the Sami for centuries. However, one cannot help but think that there is something more being expressed than a statement of the colonial extrapolation of natural resources on a traditionally indigenous territory. The poetic beauty expressed in the piece creates other juxtapositions that take into consideration the need and use of natural resources by both local people and large corporations and the complex dynamics that this tension creates between these various interests. However, Holm's approach here injects a more sustainable component such as respect for natural resources both renewable and non, different landscapes and lifestyles, be they urban or rural, traditional or modern ways of using natural resources or a mix, respect for human made constructions and landscapes, be it a gas plant or something else. Similarly, these issues also manifest themselves in Geving's photographs of the Syd-Varanger iron mine, where the images artistically point out the beauty in the structural details together with the surrounding landscape (Figure 5.2, Image E). Geving herself states of the images, "there stands respect of this man-made environment."[188] Thus, rather than stressing the historical, individualized or generational view, with *Summer Solstice 2007* Holm questions the many realities of gas and oil exploration at the present time. The issue is especially apropos with the Norwegian government's recent announcement

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[187] *Background* (2008), 13.
[188] Bente Geving, taken from unpublished introduction to a book about Syd-Varanger Iron mine where Geving's photos series *Sydvaranger 2008-2009*, was included. Extract provided by artist.

that it will use NOK 180 million (€23 million) on seismic exploration near Jan Mayen Island in the Arctic Ocean and in the newly established border area to Russia in the Barents Sea for the next fiscal year (2012).[189] Thus, Holm has created both a strong political experience with *Summer Solstice 2007*, at the same time it is a poetic expression of a complex reality where the past is not returning; thus the video work perhaps refers to the present conditions and a sense of the future more than to the past.

6.6 Various Understandings of Humans' Place and Relationship to Nature in Holm's and Pedersen's Photographs

Questions similar to those that arose with regard to the *Right to Land and Water* about the role of nature and humans' relationship with it are also present in Holm's photographs entitled *Wood Images,* which were originally exhibited together with the movie. The *Wood Images* are, as he explained himself, nature photography within a landscape motif tradition (Figure 5.4, Image C). Viggo Pedersen's digital photo series titled *Nature Anonymous* arguably also falls within this category (Figure 5.8, Images D and E). Several of Holm's *Wood Images* show close up photos of a variety of different trees; however the photo provided by Holm for this thesis shows a verdant valley with mountainous hillsides. At the center of the image is a pile of stacked wood or logs. There are also some traces of a path through the valley in the background. Pedersen's images from the *Nature Anonymous* series titled *Tett Skog/Thick Forest* show, more similarly to Holm's other images in his *Wood Images* series, a mass of trees; some close up in the

front and others less focused in the background. Pedersen's image has been digitally manipulated and has three circles that show enlarged pixels covering up what was there originally; only the color squares remain.

We know from Holm's and Pedersen's interviews, that the focus is on use and beauty, and the innocence of nature specifically. Additionally, Pedersen explained that the areas that he covered up with pixels in *Thick Forest* and similarly in the image *Arrow* are parts of the images that showed human presence, such as trash cans, permanent trail markers or telephone polls. The viewer is engaged in the photo through questioning: what is behind the pixilated areas? One is compelled to ask: what is erased? In Holm's *Wood Image* the viewer's gaze focuses on a stack of piled wood, and the path behind it, creating associations with where the wood will be transported and used.

Thus, what links the photos is not only the similar presentation of nature portraits in a form that emphasizes the beauty of the trees, but also the focus on "the human absence and presence and of longing and belonging within particular landscapes," concepts Walsh raises in regard to the previously mentioned Greg Staat's photographs.[191] However, these particular images do not raise questions regarding a particular landscape, in fact they lack any indication of where the photos were taken. This arguably leads away from a localized interpretation to a generalized discussion of what nature means to us as human beings and how we identify with it and use it. These ideas are raised through by

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[189] Barents Observer Online, "State budget emphasizes northern regions," http://www.barentsobserver.com/?id=4969465&cat=0&language=en.
[191] Walsh, 47.

the artists' focus on the inherent beauty of nature; appealing to our feeling of nature as something sublime.

Thus a generic discussion of nature as a concept illustrates how Pedersen's and Holm's images independently and especially seen together explore various understandings of nature and its relation to identity. Nature is significantly important for both Norwegian and Sami culture and identity; however there is a difference in emphasis. Holm's artistic relation to nature and his Sami background have been discussed above in relation to *Right to Land and Water* and *Summer Solstice 2007*; however a more detailed look at Pedersen's emphasis on nature may allow for different understandings of both artists through contrast.

Pedersen's statements that he wanted to show nature's innocence relates to ideas of how nature is seen as pristine, a concept that has been linked to Norwegian identity for the last 150 years.

The Norwegian understanding of nature specifically in relation to art grew out of a period of strong cultural nationalism in the early 19th century as part of the nation building process in modern Norway as it moved toward independence.[192] The Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen has argued that the romantification of the Norwegian landscape in the 19th century stemmed from a wish to define Norwegian culture as different from its neighboring countries. Hylland Eriksen writes, "what Norway lacked in cultural riches, it made up for in its diverse, rugged and majestic

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[192] Jan Eivind Myhre, "Academic as the Ruling Elite in 19th Century Norway," *Historical Social Research* 33 (2008): 34.

landscape." [193] Similarly, Tove Nedrelid argues in her article *Use of Nature as a Norwegian Characteristic* that the influence of the natural romanticist shifted the view of nature from brutal and dangerous to beautiful and idyllic.[194]

Additionally Hyllan Eriksen argues that Norway's national identity is still intimately tied to its dramatic scenery and especially to its wintry image, and he juxtaposes this identity rooted in the rural landscape with the fact that most Norwegians live in urban settings, eating food and consuming drinks imported from all over the world. However, he says, "national identity is not found so much in actual lifestyle as it is in the cultural values and ideas embraced by a population. And the dominating Norwegian ideology connects the nation's distinctiveness and identity to the clean countryside, egalitarianism, simplicity and the white mantle of winter," which he argues Norwegians confirm in practice by a heavy focus on recreational activities in nature such as skiing, hiking and visiting their cabins in the mountains.[195]

Thus, similarly to the Norwegian identity's emphasis on the pristine, Pedersen's images also focus on the idea of nature as unspoiled, by indicating what is blemished by the touch of man. Rather than focusing on dramatic, romantic, and majestic scenery, he focuses on details within the landscape. Through the enlarged pixilated areas Pedersen wants the viewer to notice the details in nature and his images. The contrast between the natural landscape and erased areas not only poses the question of what is behind those circles, but it also enhances the immaculate beauty of the rest of the image. By drawing

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[193] Thomas Hyllan Eriksen,"Norwegian and Nature," http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/Nature.html.
[194] Tove Nederlid,"Use of Nature as a Norwegian Characteristic," *Ethnologia Scandinavia* 21 (1991): 28.
[195] Hyllan Eriksen, "Norwegian and Nature," http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/Nature.html.

our eyes to the areas of human impact Pedersen familiarizes us with what our presence changes in the landscape. Through the pixilated areas Pedersen creates a visual dialog with the viewer and pushes us to ask ourselves how we belong in the natural landscape; how we use nature; and what effects our presence has in nature?

Additionally, as pointed out by Hylland Eriksen, the stereotypical understanding of Norwegians is that they long for nature. He argues that in order to maintain their cultural identity Norwegians' immerse themselves for short periods in the landscape to feel that they belong in nature. In both Pedersen's images *Thick Forrest* and *Arrow* the objects, such as arrow trail markers and trashcans; objects that have entered into the landscape as a resulted of people's recreational use of nature have been erased. Thus by showing a nature scene familiar to most Norwegians and by appealing to the sublime contrasted with the unknown, hidden behind the enlarged pixel fields, Pedersen's images ask questions about the effects of the current modern Norwegian lifestyle and present cultural values associated with nature and identity. Additionally, Pedersen's stated environmental concerns contribute to a more generic discussion on the current value of a pristine environment. Thus, by pointing out the effect our presence has on nature, be it recreational or industrial, the images reaffirm and at the same time question the values associated with nature and humans' place in the natural landscape.

Therefore, Pedersen's images suggest an understanding of nature that incorporates elements from Norwegian national identity, global environmentalism, and indirectly, an unstated traditional Sami worldview similar to Holm's emphasis on the Sami view of the interconnectedness of nature and humans as seen in Holm's *Wood Images*. Holm's photo

in terms of composition and sentiment gravitates more towards the format of Norwegian landscape paintings from the 19th century as beautiful and idyllic scenes; however the woodpile alludes to the concept of careful and sustainable use of resources as well as nature's inherent beauty. Interestingly, though both Pedersen's and Holm's images make constant references to and communicate a strong sense of human's presence in the landscape, no humans are depicted in any of the images. Instead, only consequences of humans' activities are shown. In Holm's as in Pedersen's images the emphasis is on humans presence, place and interaction with nature, though Holm's wood images offer a strong indication of a sustainable presence.

Holm's and Pedersen's urban connections and use of natural imagery also juxtapose urban and rural. Holm emphasized this tension in an interview with NRK Sami Radio in relation to the exhibit where *Wood Images* was first shown. Holm stated that use and identification of various trees provide important informational value when exhibited downtown Oslo and bring rural concepts into an urban context.[196] Pedersen's urban living situation and interest in environmentalism also open up the possibility of looking at nature in a more rural/urban context. Pedersen's focus in *Nature Anonymous* is not as much on nature's explicit use to us but more on pointing out the urban elements that find their way into nature because of human activity.

Thus, using Hylland Erikson's definition of identity, both Holm and Pedersen embrace and express a complex, diverse, and fluctuating identity as manifested in their portrayal and questioning of human's place and/or relationship to nature. This notion of

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[196] Anne Olli, "Geir Tore Holms utstilling i Oslo," *NRK Sápmi*, http://www.nrk.no/kanal/nrk_sapmi/1.7327261.

identity includes influences from at least both their Sami backgrounds and their Norwegian national identity; however, the overall emphasis is on forming a visual dialog around the relationship between nature and humans, and the works explicitly asks to what degree humans belong in the natural landscape and desire to do so. Pedersen emphasizes that we should interact with nature in a careful and sustainable manner; by erasing human's presence in nature he shows us that while our human 'footprint' is not visually absent, it probably should be. This perspective also resonates with what Holm stated in his interview: one should tread carefully.

6.7 Experiencing Culture Through Representation in Nango's Photographs

Until now the analysis of the photographs discussed above has focused on individualized exploration of culture and identity, conflicting landscapes, and various understandings of nature. The physical presence of humans in the landscape has been related to an intimate understanding and use of land and to the industrial exploration and exploitation of natural resources. Joar Nango's artistic works emphasize humans' relationship to the physical environment in terms of habitation and building structures.

One of the many aspects of Nango's architectural and artistic works is his photographic exploration and documentation of physical structures in the circumpolar north in relation to identity and building function. When researching his concept *Giant Lavvu Syndrome,* Nango photographed modern public buildings in northern Norway that incorporate the lavvu symbol in their design (Figure 5.6, Image A).

Ten photographs from that project are included here. The images are in color and are placed close together; thus they appear to be one continuous image. The photographs show primarily public buildings in various seasons. All photographs are centered on the buildings themselves with a limited representation of the landscape around them. The buildings appear monumental and grand, and one assumes from their signs and appearance that they are restaurants, stores and office buildings; however a few might be private houses or recreational cabins. All the buildings look fairly modern and were probably constructed within the last twenty years.

Nango lives in Oslo, and the images suggest that the photographer is taking a step back and investigating a topic he knows from an overarching professional perspective. It is the balance between form and content, or what Walsh calls the "rhythm of imagery"[197] that appears to be the center point. Rather than referring to an individualized perspective, Nango presents an objective analysis of a topic. Specifically the repetitive nature of the images centers the focus on the similarities between buildings and the incorporated Sami lavvu design elements, which in turn emphasizes Nango's argument of its frequent use in the Sápmi building landscape.

In his article *Urban Wilderness: Photographing the Scandinavian North*, Lundström eloquently states the relationship between humans' physical presence in the landscape and representation. He writes, "the human relationship with the physical environment is manifested by and generated from inhabitation and land use, settling and

[197] Walsh, 49.

living, and from cultivating, recreating, transforming and imagining physical space. In this way space is created not only from direct action but also through representation."[198]

Walsh's article serves as a useful basis for further exploration of what is represented within the giant lavvu photographs. Walsh discusses the artistic use of place and space in relation to specific physical places to create resistance to dominant narratives of colonial and post-colonial history and to foster renewal of personal and cultural strength. As noted above, the dominant understanding of the post-colonial history of the Sami is that their cultural rights and culture have been increasingly understood and accepted by the Norwegian state since the 1980s, even though several issues remain unresolved.

In terms of practical political representation, Sami researcher Else Grete Broderstad emphasizes in her 2001 article, *Political Autonomy and Integration of Authority: The Understanding of Sami Self- Determination,* that the Sami's increased political rights exist between an indigenous minority and a majority society according to the principles of political autonomy and integration.[199] Thus it is important to understand that the Sami Parliament has achieved political decision-making authority in certain cases concerning the Sami population, but she argues in several areas the integration of authority has been limited. Continuing concerns for the Sami are integration of Sami

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[198] Jan-Erik Lundström, "Urban Wilderness: Photographing the Scandinavian North," in *Nordicite*, ed. Pierre Dessureault (Canada: J'ai Vu, 2010), 73.
[199] Broderstad, 153.

issues such as Sami language, education, day care etc. at local and municipal levels outside of core Sami areas.[200]

This conceptual background is physically present in the images by Nango. A large majority of the buildings were probably constructed after the mid-1980s, a time of intense collective Sami ethno-political activities and cultural renewal. In contrast to the majority of the art discussed until this point, these images include an immediately comprehensible symbol for outsiders that indicate 'Sami'. The lavvu structure has been used as symbol to enforce the Sami cultural connection (at least) since the earliest photographs of the Sami.

However, Lundström's use of the word "representation" above arguably refers not only to the physical, but also to the artistic representation of a place and how that contributes to understanding the physical space. Taking into consideration Nango's architectural background, his uncomplicated relationship with his Sami identity, and his explicit emphasis on art as a means of posing questions and providing undefined answers, the giant lavvu images appear more as inquiry of identity and representation rather than a documentation of structural elements. Thus, the buildings themselves are visual metaphors of what one could call the Sami post-colonial and collective space. Looking at the repetitiveness of the buildings' design, one might ask what do they collectively represent? What are the limitations or strengths of such a physical representation of a culture? What does one potentially exclude by focusing on enforcing the cultural connection through a symbol?

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[200] Broderstad, 158.

Thus, the visual presentation together with the context explores questions about cultural understandings communicated in their physical representation. By incorporating the lavvu design, the buildings refer both to memories or knowledge of earlier inhabitants and history of the area or territory, while simultaneously providing a representation of the building's current cultural connection. For people approaching such structures, the design elements likely communicate merely the cultural significance of the building or its use.

One of the giant lavvus included in the photos is the Sami Parliament in Norway located in Karasjok (building number 2 from left). The Sami Parliament building was inaugurated in 2000. On its website the Sami Parliament emphasizes that its architecture has been said to synthesize modern building techniques with Sami building tradition, seen as culture in harmony with the local conditions provided by nature.[201] The Sami Parliament employs the lavvu symbol to underscore the building's use as the center for the collective ethno-political administration of the Sami people. In addition, the lavvu design element symbolizes authority or power of indigenous knowledge.

However, the political contextualization arguably changes the image of the Sami Parliament. The pictorial creation transforms, or in Lundström's words recreates the meaning of the lavvu design. Nango's images suggest an authority that only goes as far as specific cultural traits, rather than the envisioned comprehensive integrated authority. Thus, the interpretation becomes somewhat cynical and steers away from embracing public Sami buildings and their design. Therefore, combined with the political context, the lavvu in terms of the Sami Parliament becomes a symbol of the limited political

[201] Sami Parliament in Norway, http://www.samediggi.no/artikkel.aspx?MId1=3486&AId=874&back=1.

authority of the Sami in the larger Norwegian society, rather than exemplifying comprehensive cultural awareness and design. Conversely, the buildings portrayed as giant lavvus stand in strong contrast to small-scale building traditions that have come about as a result of particularized needs and local conditions provided by nature, which is still the traditional function of the lavvu as well. In addition to looking at northern and modern large scale building projects, Nango is continuously investigating do-it-your-self building practices and solutions in the circumpolar north, something he describes in his recent article titled *Nødvendighetens Estetikk/ Necessity Aesthetics.*[202] In the article Nango focuses on doghouses built by local hunters on the northwest coast of Greenland (Image 31) and roadside gardens in Newfoundland, Canada. Nango uses words to describe the construction that translate in English to creative, pragmatic, contextually applied, local solutions, rugged climate, necessary and immediate needs.

Several of Nango's other recent artistic practices such as some of his place-based installations investigate similar processes. One example is the exhibit *Kløkt* that he is co-currating and producing at the Grenseland Museet in Kirkenes, Norway in late October 2011. In his blog about the project, Nango translates the term 'kløkt' to *indigenuity* in English. The exhibit is described as a project that investigates the local and indigenous ingenuity in everyday design in connection with the need for more sustainable and sensible use of resources in the northern parts of Finland, Sweden and Norway.[203]

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[202] Joar Nango, "Nødveninghetens Estetikk." *Ottar – Samisk Kunst* 4 (2010): 31.
[203] Joar Nango and Silje Figenschou Thoresen, "Indigenuity: Indigenous Ingenuity in Northern Areas," http://indigenuityproject.com/about/.

Returning to the giant lavvu images, and seeing them in relation to local "indigenuity" construction, it is evident that Nango's artistic emphasis is not on celebrating the grandeurs of large Sami buildings, but instead on questioning their design, function and relationship to the place, space and people. The large lavvu images, contrasted with the more localized and pragmatic designs described in *Kløkt* seem to stray far from the more localized symbiotic relationship between form and purpose.

Thus, Nango's artistic representation of the giant lavvu images transforms the way one perceives the physical collective cultural presentation in public Sami buildings. With the Giant Lavvu images Nango questions the post-colonial cultural understanding and recreation of a people's image that is communicated through symbolic representation. Nango thus initiates a dialog between the historical and traditional and the present and future. Arguably the lavvu comes to be seen as a static symbolic element of the Sami culture and identity. Nango's contextualization indicates the cultural implications of a design and its consequences for preserving and disseminating cultural complexities. Through his images Nango shows what one looses by narrowing localized "indigenuity" such as the lavvu to a symbol and design element rather than function. Thus Nango highlights how the Sami identity, when simplified, loses cultural values and ideas that are more complete in the notion of indigenuity. By using his professional and cultural backgrounds, his knowledge and connection to the area, Nango is able to navigate among all these spheres to question the representation of a culture. Thus, by showing the repetitive modern giant lavvu designs, Nango expresses the cultural

complexities and dynamic relationships that lie within the localized physical representation of a culture in the landscape.

6.8 Transnational Borderless Environmental Experiences in Pedersen's Artworks

The artworks discussed above have either been photography or video works and have to a certain extent been documentations of existing realities. The focus will now move away from photography to discuss in detail some of Pedersen's recent painting and mixed media works. However, Walsh's perspective on how to analyze photography in relation to dominant narratives of colonial and post-colonial issues related to place and space will be applied to these art forms, in addition to a more transnational environmental focus.

Pedersen has three artworks that are mainly based on drawing and painting, and that, seen together, create an interesting reflection on the transnational nature of environmental issues, while being anchored in specific locations. The artworks are *Nature Montage* (Figure 5.8, Image A), which was created a few years ago, and *Ku/Cow* (Figure 5.8, Image F), and *Rein/Reindeer* (Figure 5.8, Image C), which were finished within the last year.

Pedersen's explanation of *Nature Montage* was presented in detail above in his artist profile. In short it is a mixed media compilation, consisting of nine individual colored drawings that indicated connection to the Pasvik Valley in northern Norway, arranged in a flowing line ending in a large green spot painted directly on the wall with tropical forest plants drawn on it. The artwork also includes some three-dimensional

paper woodpeckers on the floor and loud speakers that twitter birdsongs specific to the Pasvik area.

The painting *Cow* shows a drawn presumably Hindi or Indian sacred cow in the left corner. The cow's head is turned, so it stares directly at the viewer. The cow is balanced by a medium-sized green spot painted in the right half of the painting that includes various types of tree leaves, leaves that appear to be Norwegian fauna, or vegetation in general. The remaining canvas is painted a cream yellow color. The painting *Reindeer* appears similar, however the painting's objects are arranged in the opposite direction. One assumes based on the title that a reindeer appears in the right hand corner, facing the viewer, and in the upper left hand side reindeer lichen and tundra grassland are painted. The whole canvas, except for the objects, is covered in an aqua green color. In both paintings the objects seem disproportionately small compared to the overwhelming presentation of the evenly applied yellow cream and aqua green paints. However the focus point in both paintings is the line of vision that is created between the objects and the background. In addition the stylistic form could be seen as a mix of realistic imagery combined with abstract color fields.

Pedersen explained that *Nature Montage* is about crossing borders, coming to a place for a short period of time, using the resources that are there and then leaving. He has also said that *Nature Montage* may be his only artwork that is based on something specifically Sami, such as the colors and theme.

We know that Pedersen has a strong connection to Nesseby, an area in Finnmark County located in the Varangerfjord close to the Barents Sea and in close proximity to

the borders of Finland and Russia. The Nesseby Municipality emphasizes on its website that it is an international community with people from a variety of backgrounds including Sea Sami, reindeer herding Sami, Norwegians, Kveni, and Russians.[204]

Thus combined with the contextual background, the starting point for an analytical discussion of Pedersen's artworks is arguably Finnmark, Norway. His explanation and emphasis on borderless travel allude to the traditional reindeer herding Sami's close connection with nature and a nomadic way of life, migrating between the Norwegian sea fells (mountains) and Swedish and Finnish tundra, as is vividly explained by the late Sami Johan Turi in his book *Turi's Book of Lappland.*[205] It also evokes thoughts of the Sami Parliamentary Council's (the joint Nordic Sami initiative) current work on the Nordic Sami Convention to tackle problems such as land rights and reindeer herding that national borders cause for the Sami.

The current understanding by the Nordic governments is that reindeer herders may only herd their reindeer within their respective national borders, with only a few exceptions in place. Additionally, land rights in northern Norway are highly contested, as noted in the discussions of the Finnmark's Act above. The Norwegian government's position regarding land use in the North appears to focus strongly on increased industrial development related to oil and gas exploration.

The Sami Parliamentary Council argues that the Sami have an inherent right to use large areas in the north, even though they are areas dedicated to natural resource

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[204] Nesseby Muncipality, http://www.nesseby.kommune.no/index.php?id=242461.
[205] Johan Turi, *Turi's Book of Lappland: Edited and Translated into Danish by Emilie Demant Hatt* (The Netherlands: Anthropological Publications, 1966 (1910)).

exploration and development or are land located in neighboring countries. The International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry states on its website that the tension underlying conflicts surrounding reindeer herding relates to the fact that reindeer need extensive, undisturbed areas the whole year round for quiet and good pasture areas.[206] Even though reindeer herding has been extensively modernized and motorized since Turi's book was written, reindeer herders are still concerned with issues that affect their pasture areas such as borders, land developments in the form of mining, defense activities, national parks, oil and gas activities, wind power development and recreational cabin building. All elements seen together create fragmented pastures. In addition, other issues affect the viability of the existing pastures, such as overgrazing and the potential effects of climate change.[207]

Therefore, in the *Reindeer* painting, the reindeer appears to signify conflicting perspectives on the use of land. The reindeer or caribou is a natural part of northern ecosystems and is associated with northern indigenous groups such as the Sami. In the painting the reindeer is positioned away from the pasture area surrounded by a large color field. The aqua green color suggests cold environments. The drawn lichen could be seen as a representation of northern landscapes and pasture areas. Understood together with the political contextualization, the way in which the aqua green color encroaches on or

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[206] International Center for Reindeer Husbandry website, http://icr.arcticportal.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=687&Itemid=124&lang=en&limitstart=6.

[207] International Center for Reindeer Husbandry website, http://icr.arcticportal.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=687&Itemid=124&lang=en&limitstart=6.

nearly covers the drawn lichen symbolizes how all the human made, governmental and industrial challenges threaten the reindeer and their herders' pasture.

Thus, anchoring this understanding of the visual to Pedersen's contextual background, the reindeer and lichen signify the local connection to the place, visualizing the historical and current politics that have affected the Sami herders' current situation and their need for large undisturbed land areas. Furthermore, the pleading look of the reindeer challenges us, and wants our attention; literally to look at the issues at hand. Therefore the reindeer also becomes a symbol of Sami reindeer herders' experience of changes to their traditional way of living and their relationship to the land.

Seen together, *Nature Montage* and *Reindeer* provide an emphasis on the natural borderless character of nature and its traditional use by people who live in a close relationship with it. Similarly to Rognli's *The Mountains,* the *Reindeer* painting visualizes local and indigenous culture's dependence on traditional occupations, however modernized, and its local material base for cultural identity and survival. More specifically the painting abstractly conceptualizes and visualizes researcher Jan Åge Riseth's statement regarding modern Sami reindeer management; "the combination of strong external pressure on the land, and weak external property rights causes a stress within the industry (reindeer herding) as a whole."[208]

However, Pedersen's explicit emphasis on nature and environmentalism as his artistic frame of reference creates other understandings of his artworks and perhaps also

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[208] Jan Åge Riseth, "Sami Reindeer Management in Norway: Modernization Challenges and Conflicting Strategies," in *Indigenous Peoples – Resource Management and Global Rights*, ed. Svein Jentoft, Henry Minde, and Ragnar Nilsen (The Netherlands: Eburon Delft, 2003), 244.

the Sami's situation. Contextualizing the *Reindeer* painting together with both *Nature Montage* and *Cow* evokes different interpretations and more generic experiences of nature and environmental issues. In this setting the reindeer could be interpreted as a symbol for changes within ecosystems in general, rather than specifically the right to use of land. The *Nature Montage* artistically visualizes how the natural environment around Nesseby is interconnected to other parts of the world. Specifically, Pedersen said that the birds combined with the large green spot exemplify the Amazon and indicate the migrations of birds from the southern to the northern hemisphere.

The painting *Cow* seen together with *Reindeer* raises the issue of environmental stresses not only in Northern Norway but also in other parts of the world. The cream yellow color is reminiscent of the color of India's Taj Mahal. The cow, and its diminishing green grass area, together with the encroaching yellow cream color, brings to mind images from India where sacred cows lie down or stand in the middle of congested streets faraway from any natural vegetation, however untouched. Seen together with the reindeer, the reindeer's significance translates to the cow and it becomes a symbol for the value placed on animals and nature in other parts of the world. The cream yellow color therefore represents humans' infringement on the natural environment, even when we hold the natural in high regard. The similar compositions of *Reindeer* and *Cow* attempt an artistic dialogue between the two cultures and create opportunities for questioning the environmental scenarios facing India such as rapid population growth and industrialization and how that translates to eventualities in the circumpolar north or visa versa. In addition, this comparison points out the transnational notion of how

environmental issues in one-place affect other areas, for instance the global challenge of human-induced climate change and loss of vegetation.

Thus, seen together Pedersen's artworks provide an abstract conceptualization and inquiry into the interconnectedness of environmental issues and their potential effects on culture. This is visually illustrated by emphasizing cultural and environmental similarities by juxtaposing realistic depictions of animals that have a specific symbolic cultural value, or that are cultural identity markers, with large overpowering color fields. The symbols of the reindeer and the cow highlight the complexity and changes that impact sustaining traditional ways of life and values that are seemingly in tension with the modern and industrial. Thus seen together the paintings explore the dynamic transcultural permeability of environmental issues and their potential effects on the evolution of cultural identities.

Finally, by having the viewer face the animals head on, ultimately demanding a response, Pedersen communicates a latent urgency for engagement in environmental issues. Thus, Pedersen's artworks provide an artistic transnational borderless reflection on environmental issues rooted in specific geographical locations all over the world; this takes the analysis beyond the specificities of the Sami's situation to the entire circumpolar north and beyond.

6.9 Transcultural Visual Artistic Issues, Expressions, Dialogs and Identities

Having explored the specifics of a few selected artworks, the contemporary visual Sami art as presented here appears transcultural in terms of issues, expressions, dialogs

and identities. The artworks exemplified above are mainly photography, video, film, multimedia, publications, painting, and drawing. Thus, the visual dialog is realized by using artistic media and forms that are familiar to most people. Noel Carroll argues in her article *Art and Globalization* that the international art scene has now become truly transnational in terms of artists' choice of artistic medium, visual 'language' or ways of expressing ideas, presentation and interpretation of issues. She bases her statement on recent observations of contemporary international art biennales. She finds them to be dominated by video, film photography, installation pieces, conceptual art, and performance art, and the art is presented to be interpreted within certain frameworks of progressive politics such as post-colonialism, global inequality, human rights, identity politics and politics of representation.[209] Furthermore Carroll emphasizes that because of the ease of dissemination of these art forms through technological communications, and the wide international broadcast of the international art scene, international sense-making strategies are created, for instance the juxtaposition between something local and metropolitan, and visual language as opposed to text, and she argues that this makes possible "transnational conversations between artistic senders and receivers who speak different native languages," which transforms the transnational art world into a "internally coherent practice."[210]

The Sami artists' visual language focused on post-colonialism, identity and representation seems to resonate with the transnational ways of expression emphasized

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[209] Noël Carroll, "Art and Globalization: Then and Now," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism-Special Issue: Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics* 65 (2007): 140.
[210] Carroll, 140-141.

by Carroll. Thus, when analyzing, interacting with and interpreting contemporary visual Sami art, one is not walking into unfamiliar territory but rather a recognizable visual language. While the context might be something that is specific to the Sami, the themes resonate with people in many places in the world even though they do not necessarily understand the specific Sami meaning or connection in the image. Therefore, the way in which these transnational artistic methods are used to convey meaning makes possible for what Walsh calls an 'intercultural spectatorship.'[211] Thus Hansen can rightfully posit that contemporary Sami art is writing itself into current art history, and Lundström's point in his interview that there is no difference between contemporary Nordic, Norwegian, Sami or even global visual art is well taken. He said that, barring a few exceptions, there is only global art in the true international meaning of the word. Thus while the traditional understanding of contemporary Sami art is perhaps institutionally and geographically perceived as on the periphery, the art itself and the artistic methods used to create them are not. Moreover the immediate and virtual accessibility of contemporary visual Sami art makes it part of the grand pool of visual renderings currently existing in the world.

Furthermore, not only are the choice of artistic media and visual language transnational, the artists themselves are as well. The artists presented have explicitly emphasized diverse cultural backgrounds, and as termed by Rognli their backgrounds are post-modern. As mentioned previously being part of several cultural backgrounds at once

[211] Walsh, 40.

has been defined as "transcultural patterning" and individuals are seen as both inheritors and shapers of new identities.[212]

Relating the concept of transcultural identity to the artists presented above, it is exactly their ability to navigate between (at least) Sami and Norwegian cultural heritage, international experiences, strong emotional connection to northern Norway, local and rural conditions, urban living situations, advanced academic artistic education, and a transnational artistic form and language that contributes to the interesting and complex narration within their art as presented in the analysis above. Thus by emphasizing the transcultural, transnational and contextual meaning of the art the analysis illustrates what Mirzoeff calls the 'transcultural permeability' and the instability or changing nature of identity, history and present realities. [213] The artists are navigating through and among different understandings of history, sense of space and place, and the parallel, conflicting and/or intersecting histories of local and national politics, Norwegian and Sami cultures, collective and personal identities, and urban outsider versus knowledgeable insider's perspectives. Thus they are creating new ways of questioning, understanding and discussing the common post-colonial history in the Scandinavian North between the Sami and Norwegians and others.

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[212] Schneider, 8.
[213] Mirzoeff, 26.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Contemporary visual Sami art as presented here is transnational in nature and is currently concerned with the issues of humans' relationship to the natural environment; collective and personal identity; and political and cultural rights. The artists use their Sami background as a specific context to highlight these generic issues. The artworks visualize these broad issues with subject matter related to human's reliance and/or need for the natural world localised in northern Norway and traditional Sami areas, however seen through a lens removed from these areas, as all artists live in Oslo, Norway or in its close proximity.

Through contextualizing the artworks within a post-colonial framework highlighting the dominant Sami historical, political and societal narratives from the 1970s until now, and contrasting them with the official Norwegian image of Norway as a unified "oil and gas nation," a "human rights nation" or a "fishing nation" the artworks shed light on and question dominant historical perspectives and become visual inquiries of the Sami's political and societal situation currently or in recent history in Norway.

The specific issues that materialize to highlight the broader issues of humans' relationship to the natural environment are: collective and personal identity; political and cultural rights, which are *inquiries* into and *discussions* of the presentation and representation of the ethno-political collective Sami identity and Sami rights, individual Sami identity, and identity and its link to people's local environment; human's place in, use and relationship with nature; local interests seen in relation to national and global

strategies of industrial developments; Sami versus Norwegian culture or world view; and indigenous minorities concerns in the majority Norwegian society.

The visual discussions are all executed in a transnational artistic form and language using photography, video work, paintings and mixed media, and transnational frameworks such as post-colonialism, global inequality, human rights, identity politics and politics of representation. Therefore contemporary visual Sami artists are participating in transcultural and intercultural artistic dialogs. The artists' transcultural backgrounds, seen here as a mix between being knowledgeable insiders of local issues and landscapes in Sami areas, and being immersed in the Norwegian urban lifestyle and international experiences, manifest themselves visually in their ability to focus on specific local cultural details and at the same time present generic documentations or global presentations of issues such as identity and environmental concerns. The artists are embedded in an urban lifestyle in Oslo and have post-modern transcultural identities, and their relationship to the natural world does not resemble that of their Sami ancestors, yet is inspired by and is visually connected to traditional Sami areas focusing on the natural landscape, world-view or local people. Thus the Sami connection is a tool or a visual channel through which the artists choose to present more overarching generic issues of humans' relationship to the natural environment; collective and personal identity; and political and cultural rights.

In terms of an analytical framework, the transcultural components within contemporary visual Sami art illustrate how issues about the minority/ majority debate in the art do not necessarily categorize the artwork itself as indigenous or minority art. Yet

indigenous theory is constructive in highlighting certain non-material aspects of the art or in illustrating the collective and opposing viewpoint to the individualized and nuanced inquiries within the contemporary visual Sami art presented here.

The issues of identity and representation are conceptualized and portrayed in the artworks through investigating what it means to be Sami 30 years after the intense ethno-political fight for Sami rights. The inquiries of Sami collective and individual identity become visible in the artworks through juxtaposing the colonial and collective Sami representation, in terms of the visual idea of Sami as a people dressed in traditional costumes in the Sami cultural landscape with Geving's portrayal of three elderly Sea Sami women and Rognli's portraits of elderly people in Kåfjord. Rognli's photos in *The Mountain* series of abandoned houses and fishing equipment emphasize a different, complex and cultural visual aspect of Sami identity. His photographs visualize how the Norwegian history of assimilation and fjord fishing management has contributed to changing the Sea Sami identity by constricting access to its local material base. Another perspective on the discussion of Sami identity is Nango's emphasis on Sami buildings in his Giant Lavvu images. Nango questions the current visualized representation of the collective understanding of Sami identity. His work is centered around the politics of representation and his work asks questions of how the visual presentation of a people is communicated through static symbolic representation such as the lavvu and what this means for the emerging more fluid transcultural Sami identity.

Moreover the generic discussion of humans' relationship with nature and the link between identity and nature materializes with visual references to subsistence activities,

recreational and industrial use of nature, and local and global environmental concerns with specific references to northern Norway and traditional Sami areas. This is particularly observable in Rognli's images of his birthplace Manndalen and the area's crumbling house structures. Moreover, Rognli's artworks visualize how identity and culture relate to the ability or right to execute subsistence activities such as fjord fishing, highlighting with decaying fishing equipment the inequality within Norwegian fishing rights.

Thus, political, and cultural rights, in terms of right to land and water emerge as themes through the artists' visual exploration of the land and water cultural landscapes. Holm visualizes the complexities surrounding political rights with an individualized portrayal of the use of the natural resource base in his video work *Right to Land and Water*, and with a poetic experience of how industrial structures change the Arctic landscape in *Summer Solstice 2007*.

Moreover, in addition to rural place- and space-specific visualization, the artists appeal to overarching sublime global cultural concepts in their artworks, as well as to traditional and non- traditional Sami symbolism to visually communicate their intents. Overall the artworks appeal to tangible concepts such as the sublime feeling of natural beauty as in Holm's videos *Right to Land and Water* and *Wood Images* that show lush trees and steep valleys, and to traditional Sami symbolism as in Nango's lavvu images and Pedersen's reindeer painting. Holm uses non-traditional Sami symbolic representation in his video work *Right to Land and Water* by showing chopping wood with a chain saw.

The artworks appeal as well to sublime non-material cultural concepts such as equal and human rights, and individual freedom. Equal and human rights appear in Rognli's *The Mountains* that indicate a restrain of Sea Sami fjord fishing rights. Pedersen and Holm appeal to the notion of individual freedom in Pedersen's focus on borderless travel in *Nature Montage* and Holm's discussion of the individual's right to use the land where one lives.

Similarly to Hanne H. Hansen's emphasis on how the Sami art movement that emerged in Scandinavia in the late 1960s represented something new and was political in nature, this thesis posits that current contemporary visual Sami art is political as well. However the political emphasis is not as fundamental in nature as it was decades ago because the Sami now are recognized as an indigenous people with certain cultural and political rights. Hansen emphasizes that contemporary Sami art is also a commentary on internal Sami specific issues such as what it means to be Sami and a participant in the world,[214] and the artworks discussed also here could be seen as such. To reiterate Eidheim's argument mentioned in the Introduction, Sami artists can be seen as "influential *visual* voices in the discourse about what it means to be Sami in the modern world;"[215] that is, visual expressions reflect a culture or the person who created it. This thesis shows that the contextual information, i.e. artists' backgrounds and historical, social, and political issues are reflected in visual contemporary Sami art by the artists included here, and both the art works and artists' backgrounds show new emerging

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[214] Hansen (2007), 99.
[215] Eidheim, "On the Organization of Knowledge in Sami Ethno-Politics," 1995, http://www.sze.hu/mtdi/gyoreuropa/ANGOL/EidheimSamiEthno.doc.

transcultural Sami identities. Thus the artworks visually suggest new ways of investigating current Sami identity and political issues, as what is seen as Sami itself is changing. The visual images of Sami identity as presented by the artists ask questions about how *these* artworks visually contribute to the current understanding of the Sami and Sami identity. Following this reasoning, the artworks contribute to the complex and constantly evolving visual understanding of Sami identity. For instance, the artworks question the specific visual presentation and representation of Sami identity such as the collective ethno-politically focused Sami identity used by the Sami Parliament in Norway and Sweden on their websites. Additionally the artworks demand questions about how the visual Sami identity is evolving, as for example Sami identities become transcultural in nature.

Visual expressions also raise question of whether they can both reflect a culture or the person who created them and at the same time be perceived as a documentation of current Sami society. The contextualization, biographical and societal, is grounded in information that is perceived as real; however the artworks themselves, even though some of them are close to realistic photographic documentations, are ultimately artistic expressions. In what ways, especially the *artistic* photographs should or could be perceived as cultural documentation is a subject for further research, a field in which visual and social anthropologists such as Thera Mjaaland and Elizabeth Edwards are already involved.

The basic exploratory nature of this research project introduces new empirical material to the relatively unstudied contemporary visual Sami art discourse. Rather than

explaining several possible interpretative perspectives, the thesis has explored which issues interest contemporary Sami artists located in Oslo, and how these concerns materialize in their art. The interviews have offered valuable insight into how the artworks can be understood. Thus, the interviews presented a few artists and their thoughts on their art in order to explore some current activities within contemporary visual Sami art. The photographs of the artists contributed to rendering the text a personal and intimate encounter with the artists and their artwork. By agreeing to be photographed, the artists created a stronger presence for themselves in the interpretation of their artwork by being visible reminders of who has imagined what was created or visualized. Furthermore, being photographed allowed the artists more control over how they are presented as artists, instead of leaving it to third party interpretation.

There is potential for further empirical research on other viewpoints of the artworks mentioned above, other artworks by these artists that were not discussed here, or of other Sami artists in general. Specifically more visual documentation of the artists and their working methods and thoughts would be a great contribution to additional knowledge in the field. It is here important to reiterate Sontag's emphasis on the value of photographic documentation: what is recorded and photographed is remembered and knowledge obtained about it. Thus, further visual documentation would potentially heighten the importance of contemporary visual Sami art in general and demonstrate its value as an expression of contemporary local, national, and global societal issues.

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Appendix

Interview Questions/ *Spørsmål* (Questions are listed in both English and Norwegian)

1. Please tell me about yourself and your artistic background/ *Kan du fortelle meg litt om deg selv, og din kunstneriske bakgrunn.*
2. Why did you decide to become an artist? */Hvorfor bestemte du deg for å bli kunstner?*
3. Please tell me about your art/ *Fortell meg om kunsten din.*
4. How do you like to be represented to your audience? And to a United States audience? / *Hvordan liker du å fremstå for kunsterpublikumet? Og for folk i USA?*
5. What do you think you and your art represent to the audience? *Hva tror du, du, og din kunst representerer for andre?*
6. Do you see yourself as a global artist transcending cultures? *Ser du deg selv som en global kunster som overgår kulturelle grenser?*
7. What's the role of art? *Hva er kunstens rolle/oppgave?*
8. In terms of the world of art- where do you see yourself fitting in*? Hvis du tenker på verdens kunsthistorie – hvor passer du inn?*
9. In terms of a Sami context, how do you see yourself? / *I en samisk sammenheng, hvordan ser du deg selv som kunstner?*
10. Sami identity- what is it and does it matter for your art? Are you more than an artist (holistic)? */Samisk identitet hva er det, og hva betyr det i forhold til din kunst?*
11. Do you explicitly use Sami symbolism in your art*? / Bruker du symboler eller tradisjonelle samiske uttrykksformer i din kunst?*
12. Do you think being a Sami has influences your artworks in terms of medium, imagery, from and color etc.?/ *Tror du at din samiske bakgrunn har påvirket din kunst i form av valg av medium, utrykk, form og farge?*
13. Does the organizational, educational and financial support structure surrounding the Sami art shape you as an artist? *Påvirker den samiske kunstner 'infrastrukturen' deg som kunstner? Med infrastruktur så mener jeg Samisk kunster senter og støtte fra Sametinget?*
14. How do you see the Sami visual art scene? / *Hvordan ser du den samiske billedkunst 'verden'?*
15. How do you think the contemporary Sami visual art scene developed (both historically and functionally)? / *Kan du forklare hvordan samiske samtidskunsten utviklet seg til i dag?*
16. What is your relationship to other arctic indigenous groups? / *Hvordan ser du deg selv i forhold til andre arktiske urbefolkningsgrupper?*
17. Does political and environmental issues in the North affect your artwork? */Påvirker politiske debatter og miljømessige endringer i nord din kunst?*

18. It seems like Sami visual art is not very well know in society – why do you think that is? *På meg så virker det som om samisk samtidskunst ikke er så godt kjent i samfunnet. Stemmer det, og hvis så, hvorfor tror du det er slik?*